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AN ESCAPER'S LOG:  
DUNCAN GRINNELL-MILNE

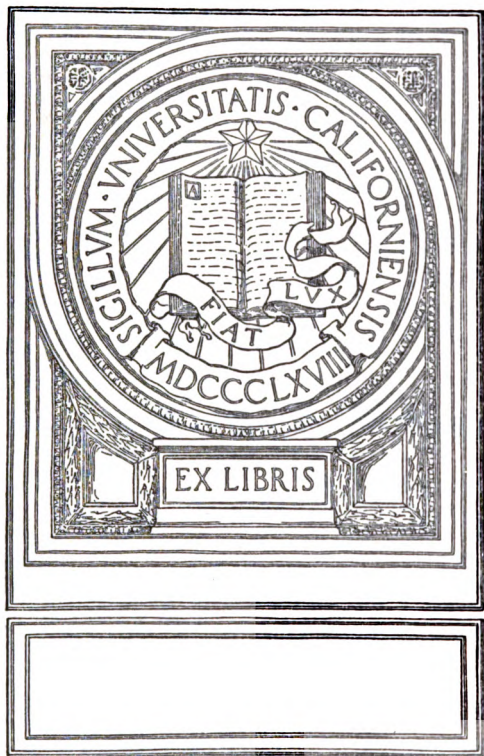
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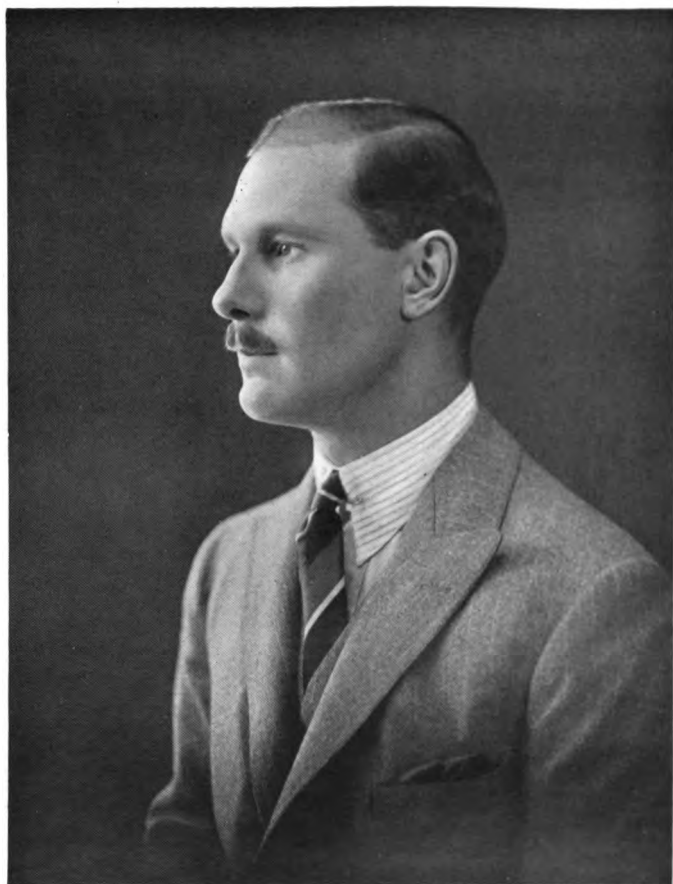
## **AN ESCAPER'S LOG**





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THE AUTHOR IN 1921

# AN ESCAPER'S LOG

By DUNCAN GRINNELL-MILNE  
M.C., D.F.C., LATE CAPTAIN R.A.F.  
WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS AND  
THREE SKETCH MAPS    ::    ::    ::

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

**T**HIS is my first book. I hope therefore that much will be forgiven me. Nevertheless an apology is needed: the book is about the late war. Not, I must hasten to add, an expert opinion on its why and wherefore, not a criticism of British or French strategy, nor yet a story of life in the trenches. It is a tale—or rather a series of tales—about prisoners and escaping.

It has, I am aware, other great faults. It is not well written; it is too long in places, too short in others. It is not complete; the first person singular is too often employed, and the adventures of others are neglected. But I have written from memory entirely and I have attempted to write nothing but the truth. I have made practically no excursions into the realms of hearsay.

Much has been told already about prisoners of war, but not too much—which is this book's only *raison d'être*.

As far as possible I have avoided recriminations against our late enemies. The war has been over a long time and it serves no useful purpose to reopen half-healed wounds. The treatment of prisoners in Germany was undoubtedly bad; often, especially in the case of the rank and file, terrible. But war is terrible and being a prisoner is a part of war—although

many thought it meant a life of idle luxury for those tired of fighting.

I do not defend the Germans. For some things there is no defence ; for the rest, the Germans are capable of taking care of themselves. Of one thing I am certain : I would sooner be a prisoner in Germany than in certain other countries who were opposed to her.

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# **AN ESCAPER'S LOG**

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# AN ESCAPER'S LOG

## CHAPTER I

**I**N the autumn of 1915, when the excitement caused by the unsuccessful battle of Loos had subsided, and the conditions under which we were living in France had again become normal—when, in the words of a certain Staff Officer, “we had returned to the piping times of peace”—flying was by no means an unpleasant occupation. The risks in those days were, of course, greater than they are now, and the work was periodically arduous, but on the whole we lived in far greater comfort than did the unfortunate men in the trenches, and those of us who had come from the infantry had no real cause to regret our choice.

From one cause or another we suffered a good many losses and in the course of about three months the flying personnel of the squadron to which I belonged had been almost completely replaced. I began to count myself among the lucky ones, since not only had I successfully completed a number of more or less important flights, but I had come unscathed through no less than four aerial combats—quite a large number at the time.

It all seems such a long time ago that I find it difficult to remember my feelings when first I flew in



France, but sometimes when day-dreaming I manage to recapture some of the thrill of those early days of war-flying, when the average speed of our primitive machines rarely exceeded sixty miles an hour, and the art of aerial fighting was almost unknown. There were no "specialist" squadrons then, and pilots in the Royal Flying Corps were ready to start at a moment's notice on bombing raids, long or short reconnaissances, photographic expeditions or artillery-observation flights. Fighting in the air was regarded as a "side-show." Occasionally, it is true, machines were sent up to attack and pursue some of the more daring German aircraft which had ventured to cross our lines, but it was a rare occurrence for an enemy to be brought down.

One day, towards the end of November 1915, some twenty-five of our aeroplanes sallied forth to bomb a railway junction on the German side of the lines. How much damage we did was difficult to estimate, but it is certain that one of the results of this raid was to spur the German airmen into greater activity than they had shown of late.

On November 28th a German machine appeared over our aerodrome and I was sent up in pursuit, accompanied by my observer, a Captain Strong. For nearly an hour we climbed slowly towards the enemy, who pursued a leisurely course to the northward. At last we reached his height—about 6000 feet—and at the same time he must have caught sight of us, for he turned back towards the lines. His course now brought him close alongside, and as he passed my observer opened fire with the Lewis gun. Just then

I caught sight of three other German machines coming towards us ; it looked as though we were trapped and I at once endeavoured to manœuvre for a better position. The first aeroplane on the approach of his friends returned on our starboard side, fired at us and received a broadside at the hands of my observer. The enemy then turned slowly away, and a second or two later dived down steeply. I felt certain that he had been hit, but I was unable to watch him for long as the other three Germans were now closing in on us. For the next few minutes I was kept busy dodging and swerving in every direction in an attempt to avoid the enemy's fire. In 1915 aerial gunners were poorly trained and it must have been to this fact that we owed our preservation more than to any skill upon our own part. The enemy flew in no particular formation, and by getting in each other's way hindered their own fire considerably. Nevertheless the crack of passing bullets was almost continuous, and every now and then a slight jar and a flying splinter told that a shot had got home on our machine.

The fight lasted quite a long time, and after a short period of nervousness I began to enjoy myself thoroughly. I remember waving at one of the Germans as he came up close alongside and then emptying my automatic pistol in the vain hope of hitting the pilot, while my observer blazed away with his Lewis gun. After what seemed like half an hour but in reality was only some ten minutes, yet another German joined in the scrap. This time we were glad to note that he was himself being pursued by a small British monoplane, and the British machine was evidently getting the

better of him. Very shortly this latest German machine turned away and started gliding for home. One of the other Germans, who had apparently been slightly damaged by my observer's fire, also turned and made off in the direction of Lille. Whereupon the remaining two aeroplanes, finding their superiority reduced, separated and broke off the fight. We pursued one of them for some distance, but he was faster than we were and eventually eluded us by dodging behind a cloud.

At intervals during the fight I had watched our first enemy circling slowly downwards. He did not appear to be out of control, but I fancied that the pilot was wounded. This was probably the case, for towards the end of the fight I saw him land and capsize in a field almost immediately beneath us—unfortunately in the territory occupied by the Germans.

We returned to the squadron overjoyed with our success, although as a matter of fact the achievement was to lead indirectly to our undoing. Headquarters were very interested in our account of the fight and wanted to have definite confirmation of the crashed German aeroplane. Consequently next day a great friend of mine, Herbert Ward, was sent over with his observer, Buckley, to try and take a photograph of the wreck. They reached the spot and almost immediately disaster overtook them. They were attacked by a Fokker monoplane (then quite a new machine just beginning to make a name for itself) and after a short fight Ward was wounded in the knee and forced to land his aeroplane in the German trenches.

Two days later two machines of the squadron were due to carry out the periodical "long reconnaissance"

to Valenciennes. This reconnaissance, whatever its military value may have been, was undoubtedly productive of more casualties than any other job we were required to do. For one thing, although our engines were remarkably good they were not built to stand the strain of a long-distance flight at high speed. Secondly, the Germans—knowing of course all about our “long reconnaissance” flight—were in the habit of lying in wait at Douai aerodrome, rising to attack on our return journey when, short of petrol, we were generally beating against a strong wind.

Now it had been Ward's turn to undertake this flight, but Fate having seen him safely captured decided that it was my turn and that I too should be a prisoner.

The morning of December 1st was wild and blustering with half a gale of wind blowing from the north-west, but in the absence of the Squadron-Commander, who was away on duty, there was no one to stop us from going. Not that we were unwilling to start; personally I had a ridiculous idea that the reconnaissance might be productive of further fighting, from which we would return covered with eternal glory!

Strong and I left the ground at 9 a.m., followed a few minutes later by the second machine which was to act as escort. We steered south while gaining height and crossed the lines in the neighbourhood of Arras. At this point we lost sight of the escorting machine, whose pilot evidently thought that the weather was too bad. Thence we passed over Douai, Denain and Valenciennes. I circled round each of these places while my observer counted the rolling-

stock in the railway sidings, and then after going a mile or two beyond Valenciennes we turned to make for home. I had barely set the machine on its westerly course when I began to hear an ominous "knock" in the engine. At first I imagined that it was some little sound which I might have been hearing for a long time without noticing, but within a few minutes it had grown so loud that I realized we were going to have serious trouble. Suddenly there was a loud explosion; pieces of metal flew past my head and the machine was enveloped in a cloud of blue smoke. For one horrible moment I thought we had caught fire, and, switching off the engine and closing the petrol supply, I pushed the control-stick forward and dived the machine towards the earth. It was almost immediately obvious that the machine was not on fire and I gradually brought her back on to an even keel. I switched on the engine and cautiously opened the throttle, whereupon the engine started to run again, although it was now vibrating in a really astounding manner. I peered forward and noticed that with the explosion the greater part of one of the cylinders had disappeared. In spite of this I accelerated the engine as much as I dared, and the awful vibration notwithstanding we managed to make some headway. At this time our height was about 13,000 feet, and our speed between fifty-five and sixty miles an hour. I knew that we were over fifty miles from the lines and, judging from the rate at which the cloud-shadows on the ground were moving, we must have a wind of more than forty miles an hour dead against us. We were slowly losing height and the only thing to be done

was to keep a steady course more or less due west. The cold that day, particularly at that height, was intense and, the top of my compass having frosted over, it was with the greatest difficulty that I could steer with any accuracy. I find it almost impossible to describe my feelings as it gradually dawned on me that we were certain to come down within the enemy lines. I had a sensation of misery, depression and hopelessness, which grew so strong as time went on that I felt almost physically sick. I suppose it was a form of nostalgia—or was it just cowardice? At any rate, I felt unbearably sad at the idea that in all probability I would have to spend that night in a German prison.

At an altitude of about 8000 feet we saw ahead of us a huge bank of clouds stretching for miles in every direction. There was no means of avoiding these clouds as they lay right on our course, but once inside, with no sight of the earth, the suspense became even worse. We were descending more rapidly now, the engine fast running itself to pieces, still heading due west in the vain hope that we might yet reach the British lines before we were forced to land. Presently we became involved in a series of snow, hail and rain storms, and, what with the shaking of the engine and the tossing and bumping occasioned by the storm, I wondered whether we should ever reach the ground in safety.

We went down in the clouds to within (by the aneroid) 300 feet of the earth and then, just as I was beginning to consider the possibility of hitting tree-tops if we were in hilly country, the clouds broke and

we saw the ground not 200 feet beneath us. We were passing over a small village, which I was quite unable to recognize and which, with the exception of one man in civilian clothes, appeared to be deserted. The fields round about were also devoid of people, but it was still pouring with rain which probably accounted for the lack of inhabitants. Of trenches there was not a sign. I had a sickening presentiment that we could not possibly have crossed the war zone during our long flight in the clouds, but there was just a faint chance that we had. In a few minutes' time we were to find out.

The machine could hold the air no longer. Her engine had settled down to a gentle rumble and barely sufficed to drag her along. Two miles past the village we barely cleared the tops of trees standing on a piece of rising ground. Ahead of us there were more trees ; we would be unable to cross them and the end of the flight had obviously come. Turning into the wind, I landed in a ploughed field.

Strong and I immediately jumped out and held a hurried consultation. Neither of us really believed that we had crossed the trenches, although we tried to pretend to each other that there was nothing to worry about. I asked Strong to go to the edge of the field and look over the brow of the hill, towards the village, to see if anyone was coming. He had been gone barely a few seconds when I heard a yell ; turning round, I saw him rushing back shouting that the Germans were coming. The last glimmer of hope disappeared and there was only one more thing to be done. I went round to the front of the machine,

pulled off a rubber connection and set fire to the petrol. By the time the foremost German breasted the hill there was little to be seen of our unfortunate craft but a cloud of smoke and a blaze of flame. Strong rejoined me and we deliberated as to what our next move should be. It was no use running away; the Germans were coming up on two sides, about two hundred strong, and there was no cover near in which we could take refuge. And so, standing by our burning machine, we awaited their arrival.

They came up at the double, headed by a N.C.O. on a horse. All at once, when they were still some ten yards away, they came to a full stop, checked by a series of loud explosions which suddenly occurred in the aeroplane; the ammunition for the machine gun had evidently reached boiling-point and was beginning to go off. The effect on the Germans was quite extraordinary. Half their number threw themselves flat on their faces while the remainder took refuge in flight. On those who were lying down I tried a few phrases of my choicest German, informing them that we were quite harmless and would like to surrender. To this they made no reply, merely staring at us wide-eyed. It was a strange position to be in; we begged to be allowed to surrender and our enemies either lay flat on the ground in front of us or ran away. I felt like shrugging my shoulders and walking away in disgust, but presently, when our ammunition had burnt itself out, they plucked up courage and started to return. We were soon surrounded by a large crowd of harmless enough individuals, who stood gaping at us as though we had



dropped from Mars. Then some German flying officers arrived and introduced themselves to us with much bowing and saluting as if the war had never existed.

It turned out that there was a German aerodrome not far from the village we had passed and that all these men were members of a squadron, which accounted for our chivalrous reception. Apart from this we had committed no particularly war-like act that day, having been forced down by engine trouble far from the heat of battle, the Germans were by no means unfriendly. The only man who was at all nasty was a member of the German field police who, arriving late and very much out of breath to search us for arms, was furious at finding that everything of importance or interest had been burnt in our machine. The German flying officers tried to engage us in an interesting discussion on aero-dynamics, about which we knew nothing, and we took a last look at our ill-fated craft. A few minutes later we walked away with several German officers and reaching a road where a large Mercédès touring car was waiting we were bowed into the most comfortable seats and driven off at a great speed for the village.

The officers' mess was situated in a large and moderately comfortable French château not far from the aerodrome, and here we were entertained to a most excellent lunch, accompanied by numerous wines and liqueurs. After lunch the senior German officers tried to pump us for information. But since we were junior officers in a Flying Corps squadron and the questions they asked us mainly concerned the dis-

position of corps and divisions, there was little enough we could have told them even if we had wished. As a matter of fact I believe that, generally speaking, Flying Corps officers knew even less of the situation of the armies in France than, say, the average junior Infantry officer. As an instance of this I remember a story about my brother, who while flying in France was forced to land, owing to petrol shortage, in a French army zone. French soldiers immediately rushed up and seeing a machine with strange markings, and a man in unusual clothing, took him to be a German spy and hustled him off to the nearest prison, where he was questioned by a French Intelligence officer. My brother was first asked to what squadron he belonged and this he was able to answer; but having only recently joined his unit, he was quite unable to tell the Frenchman to what brigade, division or corps he was attached. He was even uncertain as to what sector of the front he came from except that his aerodrome was "somewhere near" Béthune. The Frenchman thought all this was most suspicious and kept him in prison for two whole days before a British liaison officer, who happened to know my brother, came and cleared up the mystery.

To return to my own troubles—we stayed in the German mess until four in the afternoon, spending the time chatting with the German pilots. We ascertained that the aerodrome was situated not far south of Bapaume; the wind had blown us slightly off our course, but we had actually headed for the nearest point of our lines, from which we were only about eight miles distant.

When we had said good-bye, bowed and saluted to each member of the officers' mess, where we had been very well treated, we were ushered into another car in which we were driven off to St. Quentin. The journey took nearly two hours and it was dark before we got there. We were taken first of all to the Army Headquarters, where we were again examined and pumped for information, all kinds of tricks being played on us in an attempt to extract important news which, perhaps fortunately, we did not in reality possess. The Headquarters seemed to be full of Jews, and as a matter of fact I believe that, as far as Germany was concerned, a safe distance behind the lines was throughout the war considered essential by large numbers of this race. Towards eight o'clock in the evening we left the Headquarters accompanied by a German officer who said that he was taking us to an excellent hotel. We embarked in a cab and after a few minutes' drive we arrived at the "hotel," which much to our disgust turned out to be the French civil prison. It was a large building, capable of accommodating several hundred malefactors, and I suppose that as far as such places go it was all one could desire. But at that time, still unaccustomed to prisons, the whole place struck me as being very gloomy and our reception by the head warden distinctly chilly. We were locked into separate cells, each containing a wooden bed, table, stool, and a most unpleasant smell; but I was too tired to worry much and soon fell asleep.

Next morning I awaited the coming of the Germans with impatience, thinking that we would naturally be

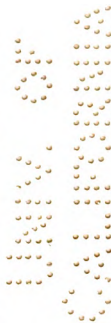
sent into Germany at once. No one came near my cell, except to push in a tray of food, until late in the afternoon when I was informed that I could go for an hour's exercise in the courtyard. Here I met Strong, a British Infantry officer named Hunter who had just been captured in a trench raid, and two French officers. The general impression among these prisoners was that we should be kept in St. Quentin for some days more. I asked one of the Frenchmen what he thought of our chances of escape if we tried from jail or from the train going to Germany. He seemed quite positive that it would be better to wait until we were settled in Germany, where we would be able to obtain the necessary maps and civilian clothing. The prison was certainly very strongly guarded and, as I could think of no method of getting out with any degree of safety, I gave up the idea.

The next few days dragged slowly by, punctuated by occasional visits from a German officer who again tried to elicit information. I found my existence in solitary confinement inexpressibly boring, although on the whole we were not badly treated and the commandant of the prison, a German Major, did his best for us and made sure that fairly good food was sent in from a small restaurant in the town. One day during the exercise hour, the commandant suggested that the prisoners of war should all have their photographs taken. We had no particular objection to make and a day or two later he presented each of us with a copy of the photograph as a memento of our stay at St. Quentin.

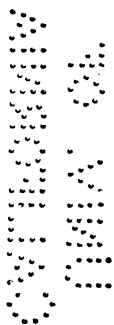
At the end of a week I was informed that I should

be leaving for Germany at once. For some reason or other, Strong was not to travel with me, but I found that Hunter, the other British prisoner, was going in his place. Just after the midday meal we were taken out of our cells and, escorted by a German officer and two or three other men, we travelled down to the station in a cab. On arrival we found that there was about half an hour's wait before the train was due and we were made to spend the time in walking up and down the platform in the company of our German officer. The station was crowded with troops going on leave and we were the object of considerable attention. It was practically my first appearance in public as a prisoner of war and I felt rather wretched at being stared at by such a mass of Germans, but they were for the most part quite friendly. At last our train came in and we were put into a second-class carriage, accompanied by a new German officer and three armed guards. The journey was really very comfortable and, as no one else was allowed in our carriage, there was plenty of room for us all. I was very surprised at our travelling second class as I had imagined that we should be consigned to a goods waggon or a cattle-truck, but I found out later that, when only one or two prisoners were travelling accompanied by a German officer, it was usual for them to get somewhat better treatment.

In spite of this comparative comfort I was very depressed as I watched the country-side slip past the windows, and realized that this would be the last glimpse of France I should get for probably many months to come. Late in the afternoon we passed Le



Author      Hunter      Two British Privates      German Guards      French Pilot      Strong  
                  French Staff Officer      German Prison Governor  
 ST. QUENTIN, DECEMBER 1915. TAKEN A FEW DAYS AFTER CAPTURE



Cateau, where we could see on the sky-line some of the old British trenches. At dusk we crossed the Belgian-French frontier and after that there was little to do except sleep. During the evening we were served with quite a respectable meal, sent in from the dining-car. We were allowed to have whatever we liked on the menu, the German officer paying for us. The German leave-train was certainly very well organized and could not be compared to the awful trains behind the British front. I was told that the train was run with very few stops, right through to Berlin with sleeping-cars going on to Warsaw and even as far as Brest-Litovsk.

Just after passing Liège, the train came to a standstill and, knowing how close we were to the Belgian-Dutch frontier, I felt that it was essential to find out if there were any means of leaving the train unobserved. The only possible way seemed to be through the lavatory window, but after a visit of inspection—accompanied by one of the guards—I found that for many reasons this was out of the question. I am sure that even if I had succeeded in getting away it would have been of no avail, dressed as I was in British uniform and without maps or money, but it was most discouraging to pass so close to Holland without having a chance to make an attempt. A little later our train crossed the German frontier and ran into the station of Herbesthal. At this place there were crowds of cheering civilians on the platform to welcome the men coming home on leave. Every one was in the best of spirits and I thought rather bitterly of my own leave which had been due this very month; in fact I



had foolishly hoped to spend Christmas in England.

After leaving Herbesthal there were no more stops till we got to Cologne at about half-past ten. Here we learned that there were no trains to Mainz, which turned out to be our destination, until two o'clock in the morning. Our German officer naturally preferred not to wait and, having handed us over to the station guard, he said good-bye to us and disappeared. Our guards took us down a subway running beneath the station and locked us up in a small waiting-room. The place was devoid of furniture and, having nothing to eat or drink and nowhere to sleep, the time passed very slowly. We spent the greater part of our three hours' wait in studying the inscriptions on the whitewashed walls. The waiting-room was evidently reserved for the use of prisoners of war, as countless names, generally with the regiment and date, were scribbled from the floor to the ceiling. It was curious to note that in some cases a prisoner had written a message to a friend in the hope that he would pass that way, and that very often the message had been replied to, sometimes many months later. All nationalities were represented, and I added my own name with the number of my squadron and the date. At length our guards returned to fetch us and just before one o'clock we got into a slow train for Mainz. This time conditions were not as comfortable, as the train was packed and we travelled third class, being without a German officer.

It was nearly four o'clock before we reached Mainz, hungry and tired out. We were at once marched up to the camp in the old citadel situated on high ground

just above the railway station of "Mainz South." As we approached the entrance two or three sentries appeared from shadowy corners of the gateway and, after interrogating our guards, the main gates were slowly opened and we were led in through the gloomy portals. We passed beneath a tall archway and came to a deserted barrack square surrounded by a few trees, through the branches of which shone the rays of a dozen arc-lamps. At that hour of the night, the silence only broken by the soft sound of our footsteps on sandy soil and the whispering of a cold wind, the camp presented a weird and uncanny appearance. As we walked across to the guard-room a police dog came and sniffed at our heels and growled, doubtful as to whether he should attack or let us pass. A little way off, in the shadow of one of the trees, a sentry stood motionless; in the distance, a glint of steel came from the bayonets of men patrolling the boundaries of the camp.

On reaching the guard-room, we were handed over to the sergeant in charge who, after consultation with some other authority in a room next door, led us into one of the tall buildings which surrounded the barrack square. Following our guide, we wandered about in a series of dark, cold passages where, on the stone floors, our footsteps rang out bravely with a metallic sound, like the clash of steel; we were at length shown into a large room containing at least a dozen empty beds. And the German having gone out, locking the door behind him, we at once lay down and forgetting our troubles were almost immediately asleep.

## CHAPTER II

**I**T was broad daylight and the whole camp was astir when we were awakened by a German orderly and given some much-needed food. We remained locked up in our room until the evening, when we were taken down into the basement and given a bath, while our clothes were removed for fumigation—a procedure intended to prevent the spread of any disease which might have been brought back from the war zone. Our disinfection completed, we were conducted to the *Kommandantur* and once again questioned for information concerning the British forces. The German officer who examined me pretended to be extremely interested in aeronautical developments, asking me numberless questions concerning different types of aeroplanes, about most of which I confess I knew less than nothing. We conversed in German—I had not realized the value of concealing my knowledge of the language—and in the middle of one of his sentences I recognized a familiar English name. On my asking him to repeat the question he said :

“ Do you know anything about the new giant Crosse and Blackwell aeroplane ? ”

For a moment I was taken aback and could only stare at him.

“ Surely you must have heard about it,” he said.  
“ One of the new prisoners told me all about it the

other day ; he said that it was well known in England. I understand that it is to be fitted with two wonderful new engines of great power made by Huntley something—I forget the exact name.”

“ Huntley and Palmer,” I suggested timidly, suddenly tumbling to the hoax of which this poor man was the victim.

“ Yes, yes,” he said, at once very keen, “ that’s it. Can you tell me anything about it ? I am always so interested in new aeroplanes ! ”

I am afraid that I was not quick-witted enough to pitch him a really perfect yarn, but by the time I had finished with him I think he was convinced that Berlin was going to be bombed that night. At any rate he was delighted with my answers and presented me with a handful of cigarettes, of which I was in great need. Soon afterwards I was dismissed and permitted to go and join the other prisoners in the camp. I was never able to find out for certain who was the inventor of the marvellous aeroplane, but I have an idea that it was a British prisoner named Medlicott.

Hunter and I were allotted beds in a room of French officers with whom, personally, I got on well. The camp, I learned, contained about six hundred prisoners, the majority of whom were French or Russian. Of the British, who numbered about a hundred, the greater part had been captured just after Mons. One or two of them were old acquaintances of mine and I heard at first hand many tales of German brutality at the beginning of the war. Most of these stories have been told and retold until they seem quite commonplace events, but some of them still retain their original

horror. I was told of the cruelty to British wounded ; how, with their wounds untended, they were herded into cattle-trucks where the floor was many inches deep in filth and left there for days while the train banded its way back to Germany. There was no medical attention, practically no food. At the stations where the train stopped, the wounded, many of whom were positively at their last gasp, would beg for water which the Germans almost invariably refused. German women—women, mark you !—wearing the uniform and badges of the Red Cross, brought bowls of water or boiling soup from the station buffets, spat into them, and threw the contents into the faces of the unfortunate men, whom they hated above all their enemies, because England was the country they feared.

The treatment of the unwounded officers was also pretty bad. Occasionally beaten with rifle butts by their guards on their way to the first camp allotted to prisoners of war, they were frequently rushed by mobs of infuriated civilians, who shouted curses at them accompanied, more often than not, by much spitting and throwing of stones. Conditions in this camp, near Torgau, were awful. Prisoners were crowded together in the meanest of huts, without bedding and with the minimum quantity of food necessary to keep them alive. They were at all times exposed to the brutality of the German guards, and the first prisoner ever to attempt an escape was brought back next day with his throat cut.

These events occurred while the Germans thought they were certain to win the war, but as soon as the wild enthusiasm waned, and they began to have

doubts about the result, their treatment of prisoners improved considerably. At the time I reached Mainz, the authorities, except for occasional bursts of ill-temper, were really quite docile and the majority of prison camps were comparatively pleasant places in which to live. When later in the war the Germans once more had cause to hope for victory, their treatment of prisoners deteriorated, until in the spring of 1918 it was once again almost as bad as in the early days.

Among the older prisoners were very few who had any intention of trying to escape. This was partly due to their ill-treatment, which lowered both their *moral* and their physique, and partly to the advice given them by the senior British officers, whose opinion naturally carried great weight. There were two or three of these senior officers who honestly believed that it was almost impossible for anyone to succeed in getting away from a camp, and quite impossible to cross a neutral frontier. The Germans had informed them that, in the event of any prisoner escaping, very severe reprisals would be taken on those remaining. This made British officers very chary of attempting to escape; it also meant that those who did try took great trouble to see that their schemes were as nearly perfect in every detail as was humanly possible.

Shortly after my arrival, on Christmas Eve, an Irishman, Lieutenant Breen of the Intelligence Corps, and Lieutenant du Baudiez of the French army, succeeded in escaping. Disguised as French orderlies, they had followed a working party into the coal store under a disused gateway in some old ramparts forming

one side of the camp, and had forced open the gate leading out. There was no sentry at this point and they were able to walk away unobserved. As they had good civilian clothes with them and Breen talked excellent German, they went straight to Mainz station, where they took a train to Wiesbaden. Here they changed trains and went on to Frankfurt. They had to break the journey at this latter town, having arrived too late to catch the last train out. They decided to wait in the town till next morning and put up at a small hotel. It may seem rather a risky thing to do, but in this case it was quite successful, and I have heard of it being done without difficulty on at least two other occasions. Next morning they unfortunately missed the first train, owing I believe to the inaccuracy of their time-table, and consequently they had to wait an hour or two in the station waiting-room. Eventually they were arrested, just as the next train was due to leave, by police who had traced them from Mainz. They were sent to prison for a short time and subsequently Breen was transferred to Fort Zorndorf, Cüstrin. This was the only escape made while I was at Mainz, and, as far as I know, the only occasion on which anyone succeeded in getting out, although of course there were many attempts.

A week after this really brilliant attempt a meeting was called by the senior British officer, at which the subject of escaping was talked over. It seems extraordinary now, but the question whether it was right for a prisoner to attempt to escape and get home to fight again was actually discussed. There were even those who, oblivious of the fact that we had not given

our parole and that escape has always been officially recognized, firmly believed that a prisoner, having once surrendered, had no right to make an attempt if he was forbidden by his captors to do so. These men qualified all attempted escapes as undignified and as showing a complete lack of discipline, but their strongest argument, the expected punishment of the remaining prisoners, was no longer valid, the Germans having taken no reprisals since Breen's attempt. On the whole the advocates of prison-breaking won the day, and from this time on escaping began to gain in popularity. Personally, I detested being a prisoner and I disliked the camp at Mainz intensely. And after all, escaping from captivity must have been one of man's earliest adventures. Surely anyone deprived of his freedom tries to regain it. At all events it was not long before—with Breen's example to guide me—I began to turn my thoughts in the right direction.

For anyone completely inexperienced and having yet to learn all the tricks of the trade, Mainz was undoubtedly a difficult camp from which to escape. I racked my brains to think of some safe way out, and I seized every possible occasion on which to talk over various schemes with other prisoners. I soon found several others who were equally determined to break out. Chief among these was Medlicott, a well-known Royal Flying Corps pilot, who had then just been captured and later on became one of the most daring and successful of all prison-breakers. Many were the wild schemes we discussed, most of them either impracticable or far too risky. At length we decided to try tunnelling, although in Mainz of all camps the



difficulties were wellnigh insuperable. The point from which we were to start caused endless argument, but eventually we fixed on a small disused cellar in a passage close to the main bathroom in the basement of one of the buildings.

There was a serious disadvantage to this scheme: the baths were only open on three days a week and then only at certain stated times. Moreover, a sentry was always on guard at the bathroom door and consequently it was only very rarely that we were able to work. We carried towels very ostentatiously and slipped past the sentry when his back was turned, but often he was too watchful and many days were wasted. Nevertheless digging was started early in January and by the end of the month we had not only sunk a shaft some four feet deep in the floor of the cellar, but we had also driven a tunnel some two or three feet in the direction of the ramparts. By this time a small gang of workmen had been formed, comprising Mulcahy-Morgan, Medlicott, Beverley Robinson and myself, all of us pilots in the Royal Flying Corps. Herbert Ward came on from hospital at about this time and also joined the party.

As soon as the work had got well under way, we became so keen on the job that, as often happens, we rather neglected taking sufficient precautions, with the result that on several occasions one or another of the Germans must undoubtedly have caught sight of us entering the cellar. One day when two of us went down to put in an afternoon's work, we found the door of the cellar not only locked, but fitted with an extra padlock. A few days later it became evident

that the Germans were aware of the identity of some of the members of the gang, for at a moment's notice Medlicott and I, in company with several of our room-mates, were transferred to another camp. Mulcahy-Morgan, who was being treated at the Mainz hospital for a broken jaw and several other wounds received at the time of his capture, was not moved till some time later, but Beverley Robinson and Ward were sent elsewhere soon after us.

At 8.30 on the morning of February 4th (1916) Medlicott and I were suddenly warned that we were to leave the camp in two hours' time. This caused us considerable consternation and a great deal of hurried packing, for although we had very little real baggage, yet we had some vague notion of escaping *en route*, and we devoted the short time left to us in endeavouring to collect and hide the rudiments of an escaping kit. It was obvious that good maps and a compass were the first essentials, but these articles were almost unobtainable at Mainz. Next in order of importance were civilian clothes and money. I was well provided with the latter commodity, which I had purchased from some French officers. Many of the French captured at Maubeuge had brought with them almost all the possessions they owned, including a large amount of French gold. I got into touch with one or two of these men and in exchange for English cheques I obtained some fifty Louis in gold coin. As far as civilian clothes were concerned, a battered old felt hat purchased by Medlicott from a German workman was the only article in our possession. Being so ill-

equipped, it was evident that we should have to abandon any idea of escaping during the journey. The prospect of a change, however, and the possibilities for getting away which a new camp might offer, made us feel quite reconciled to the idea of leaving in such a hurry and so unprepared.

When at about ten o'clock we were marched out of the camp, we found that the party consisted of a dozen French officers and half a dozen British, including Medlicott and myself. At Mainz station we embarked in a train bound for Wiesbaden. Here we changed into a slow train—so delightfully slow that it was difficult to restrain oneself from jumping off—and after winding about through some really lovely hill-country and forest we came, four hours later, to the little town of Weilburg.

### CHAPTER III

**W**EILBURG lies in a very picturesque country in the northern part of the Taunus forest, about forty miles east of the Rhine, and the camp itself was certainly the most beautifully situated of those in which I was confined. At the time of our arrival it was already occupied by one hundred and fifty Russian and twenty French officers ; also four elderly Belgian Generals, dressed, to our inexpressible delight, in civilian clothes. There were no other British officers, for which fact we were rather thankful, as we felt it gave us more chance of working out our schemes for escape undisturbed by ethical discussions on the why and wherefore.

Medlicott and I at once started to make a thorough examination of the camp and its defences. The place had originally been a school for German N.C.O's.—which accounted for a gymnasium—but new barracks had recently been built for them on a hill overlooking the town. We inhabited a three-storied brick building, some sixty yards long by twenty yards wide, surrounded by about an acre and a half of ground. The building stood on a flat sandy ledge at the bottom of a ravine through which ran the River Lahn. Behind the building was a stone wall, from which the ground rose steeply in terraces for a distance of a hundred yards to the outskirts of the town. The river curved

round in front of the camp and formed the boundary for nearly half the perimeter. On the river bank was a wire-netting fence ten feet high and a raised board-walk for the sentries. The remainder of the camp was enclosed by wooden palisades, surmounted by barbed wire, and patrolled on the outside by sentries.

Facing the river on the ground floor of our building was an archway, which had originally formed the main entrance. This archway led to a large vaulted hall with several doors, leading on one side to the canteen and to the stairs up to the first floor, and on the other side to the dining-hall. At the back of this main hall was a small green door, partly concealed behind a pile of wood and nailed up. This door at once aroused our curiosity and we determined to discover on the first possible opportunity what lay behind it. We did not have to wait long; on the second night after our arrival we were invited by some of the Russian officers to join them after dinner and discuss a few bottles of beer. After several bottles had been got rid of, the Russians asked us guardedly if we intended to escape and, on our replying in the affirmative, invited us to join forces with them. They expounded their plans and it turned out that a tunnel had actually been started behind the mysterious green door. We listened eagerly to the details and came to the conclusion that the scheme was very likely to be successful. The tunnel had been commenced by seven or eight Russians, who had prized open the green door and found that it led into an underground passage running nearly the whole length of the building. It had evidently been used as a store-room

or cellar at one time, but, the door now being nailed up, it was to be supposed that the Germans did not intend using it any more. Work was impossible by day owing to the number of Germans constantly in the building. On the other hand, at night, although the staff of the *Kommandantur* slept in a room on the first floor, there was nobody at all in the basement. The doors leading down to the dining-room and the canteen were locked after nine, but one of the Russians very skilfully moulded some pass-keys out of soft white-metal spoons. Once the doors had ceased to be an obstruction, there was nothing to prevent work in the cellar being carried on all night. When Medlicott and I joined the gang, not very much progress had been made owing to the difficulty of breaking through the foundation wall. But at length the large stones used in its construction were removed with the help of a short iron crowbar, which one of the prisoners had managed to purloin from the canteen. After breaking through the wall we struck soft earth and the digging became comparatively easy.

It was found that the handiest instrument for digging in the very confined space at our disposal was an ordinary table-knife, and the soil as it was scraped out of the mouth of the tunnel was spread along the floor of the cellar, where it would be less noticeable in the unlikely event of a German inspection. The shaft was aimed to bring us eventually to a point some little distance outside one of the wooden palisades surrounding the camp. It was estimated that the total length of the completed tunnel would not be more than fifteen yards ; working for the greater part of each

night, we should be ready to leave the camp in just over a month from the time of piercing the foundation wall. Our progress was greatly delayed, however, by the looseness of the soil, forcing us to prop up the sides and roof of the tunnel with pieces of board, which were obtained either from old packing-cases in the canteen or sometimes from the firewood supplied to us. After we had been working for a week or more, eight more British officers arrived from another camp. They were none of them averse to escaping; three were particularly keen. These were Campbell (Norfolk Regiment), Elliot (Cheshire Regiment) and Stewart (Gordon Highlanders). We at once got them to join the tunnel gang, and with two of those who had come from Mainz, Kemp and Grantham (both R.F.C.), we formed a strong party of British workers. We were able to insist on working almost every night, from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m., thus getting rid of one or two useless Russians who, now that the scheme had got fairly under way, seemed to have lost all enthusiasm in the actual work. Of the remaining Russians one was a Colonel in the Engineers, and we frequently sought his advice on the construction of the tunnel. The propping up of the sides and roof became, as we advanced, more than ever necessary, and we were afraid that we were getting too near the surface. The Russian engineer thought differently, assured us that all was well and that we need have no fear. Unfortunately we relied far too much on this view and disaster followed.

Early in March we had reached a point almost beneath the palisade and we had hopes of completing

the tunnel within a fortnight. For nearly a month we had experienced a succession of sharp frosts, accompanied by a certain amount of snow. But now a thaw set in and, on going to work one night, we found water trickling in through every crack and crevice, bringing down miniature avalanches of earth and stones; the tunnel roof was rapidly subsiding. We worked hard all night to prevent a catastrophe, using all the available boards and supports. It was of no avail; the end came next morning. Early in the day, two Germans happened to be passing the end of the building carrying a heavy ladder. One of them stumbled and, in recovering his balance, stamped on a spot immediately above the tunnel. The earth gave way beneath him and started to crumble all round. It was raining heavily at the time and within half an hour the water had washed away a large amount of soil, leaving a gaping hole in the ground. A party of Germans was immediately sent to examine the spot and, after an hour or two's work, they had dug up the greater part of the tunnel and unearthed a number of props and planks. One of these—the lid of a box of provisions—unfortunately bore Stewart's name in large letters and all the British were immediately sent for by the commandant. We were closely questioned but naturally we denied all knowledge of the matter. The Germans were fortunately unable to prove that we had taken active part in the digging and, beyond telling us that if we made another attempt we should all immediately be shot, the commandant took no action.

We were horribly upset at our failure, especially when all seemed to be going so well. The Russians on



the other hand, being mostly confirmed pessimists, told us they had long ago foreseen the end and, while assuring us of their conviction that any attempt must end in failure, immediately started digging elsewhere. This time they began to work in a corner of the gymnasium. We helped them for a period; but the attempt was quite hopeless: the shaft was directed straight at the side of the steep hill overlooking the camp, and after the first few feet the workers struck solid rock, against which nothing short of dynamite would have been of any use. This did not deter them in the least and they went on, without hope and therefore content, for several months.

I am convinced that very few Russians ever undertook the organizing and planning of an escape with any hope of getting out of Germany, but were solely impelled by the necessity of having some sort of a conspiracy or intrigue which would give them that delightful feeling of mystery and depression characteristic of the Russian mind.

But, if the Russians were keen on conspiracies and became cheerfully miserable when a scheme failed, they were also invariably anxious to find some scapegoat who could be accused of having betrayed their plans to the Germans. And concerning this side of the Russian character, an extraordinary, but none the less true, story was told me by several of the older prisoners. A Russian officer was supposed to have sold his knowledge of a prisoners' tunnel to the German commandant. On hearing of this the other Russians in the camp convened a court-martial, before which the alleged traitor was summarily arraigned. After a

short trial he was found guilty and sentenced to death. The president of the court then gave the victim the choice of three deaths: by hanging—and here a suitable piece of rope was produced—by cutting his throat, for which purpose a razor was laid before him, or by shooting. For the last alternative a rusty old pistol and two cartridges had been unearthed from Heaven knows where. Faced with these gruesome objects, the terrified captive broke away from his guards and, taking a header through several panes of glass, jumped out of the window. The room from which he jumped was three stories from the ground and the unfortunate man crashed to earth, breaking both arms and a leg. All this happened in the dead of night and the German guards hearing the fall and thinking no doubt that a prisoner was trying to escape, dashed up and finished him off with their bayonets. The Russians in the windows above, on seeing the end of their one-time brother-officer, merely shrugged their shoulders, exclaiming "*Nitchevo*," and returned to their strong drinks.

An inordinate desire for large quantities of the strongest of spirits seems to be another characteristic of the Russian nation and, at times when they were unable to obtain a sufficient supply of ordinary beverages, they would descend to almost anything. This was not, of course, the case with the better class of educated officers, but for those who had risen rapidly during the war, or had perhaps been promoted from the ranks—those in fact who represented the masses—gin, methylated spirits, eau-de-Cologne or even turpentine were positive necessities. A certain amount

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of bad wine and a large quantity of weak beer were obtainable in the canteen, but no Russian dinner, given to celebrate a birthday, a Saint's day, or an imaginary victory, was ever complete unless some sort of neat alcohol was served as a liqueur.

On the other hand, the Russians are excellent singers.

As far as traitors are concerned, after the failure of the first tunnel at Weilburg, the Russians became extremely suspicious of the head of the French orderlies. This man, known as Joseph, was certainly a most peculiar character. He wore the uniform of a sailor in the French navy, although he was reported to have been captured in a cavalry regiment. His own stories of his exploits and amazing bravery on the western front were a continual source of amusement to us, and he asserted that he had been awarded the cross of the Legion of Honour and the Military Medal several times over. The Russians, as was to be expected, took a serious view of his peculiarities, and accused him of being a German agent. A court of inquiry was assembled and, late one night, Joseph was seized and brought, struggling violently, into the room where it was to be held. The whole thing was a perfect farce ; Joseph emotionally protesting his innocence while the self-appointed president of the court, a ridiculous little Cossack, shouted at him in Russian and made various gestures expressive of hanging. The court finally broke up in confusion, everybody wanting to talk at once, and Joseph was let off with a caution.

In spite of their futility, we managed to make use of some of the Russians who had corrupted one or two of

the German guards. Through them I managed to exchange half of the French gold which I had purchased at Mainz for German money, and with some of the remaining gold I bought various odds and ends of civilian clothing from Russians and Frenchmen. One of the Cossacks also succeeded in getting us some maps and a couple of compasses, doubtless obtained, at an exorbitant cost, from one of the Germans. Good civilian clothes were always difficult to procure, but some sort of kit was fairly easy to contrive, certain portions of the Allied uniforms lending themselves to conversion. Prisoners whose uniforms had worn out were generally permitted by the Germans to buy rough civilian coats of a semi-military pattern, which were embroidered by the camp tailor with shoulder straps and red stripes; when the clothes were required for escaping purposes, the stripes and other military badges were removed without any trouble. Trousers could generally be made from any dark cloth, and at a pinch our own khaki trousers would do. It was not so easy to obtain headgear, and this difficulty was present in all camps throughout Germany. After one or two trials we discovered that a soft felt hat, such as the Germans almost invariably wore, was terribly hard to manufacture. On very rare occasions one would be smuggled out in a prisoner's parcel from England, but generally we had to content ourselves with rather poor quality caps, made out of dark cloth or government blankets.

It was nearly impossible to obtain articles of civilian clothing by bribery, German soldiers being unable to purchase them. In practically every camp there was

at least one German whom one could bribe with such luxuries as chocolate or white bread, but there was, of course, great risk attached to this proceeding and, beyond getting a few maps, there was very little these men could do.

While thinking over various methods of journeying to the frontier, apart from the immediate problem of how to break out of the camp, we were struck by the idea of making forged passports or permits to travel. At first we had no very clear knowledge of the appearance of these passes as made in Germany, but soon a stroke of good luck put us in possession of the necessary information.

An English parson who had lived in Berlin before the war was occasionally permitted to go round the various camps to look after the spiritual welfare of the British. Some of us, I am afraid, needed personal freedom more than the consolations of the Church and, when the parson came to Weilburg, we turned his visit to a more practical end. While he was holding a short service in the basement, Medlicott and I examined a small black bag he had incautiously left in our room. The first thing we saw was a brand-new railway time-table, containing a small-scale map of Germany and the various frontiers. Furthermore, on looking through a bundle of papers, we found a large number of passes signed by various highly placed German military officers. These passes, authorizing the holder to travel from one end of Germany to the other, were just what we needed. We had obviously no right to touch any of the parson's belongings, but, after debating the matter for some minutes, we decided

that for once the end would justify the means. Replacing the majority of the passes, we retained three or four as well as the time-table. The parson left shortly afterwards without noticing anything, although I believe he was very perturbed on discovering his loss some hours later.

I still feel that I owe him an apology, but as a matter of fact his papers were of inestimable value to us and formed the basis of a large number of forged passes, many of which were successfully used by escaping prisoners.

Later on in the war prisoners were forbidden to possess typewriters, but at this time Stewart was the proud owner of one of these machines and for the next few days we were busy banging out a variety of permits, containing, as well as the usual wording, a description of the particular prisoner to whom the pass was to be issued. The only real difficulty we experienced was the making of the rubber stamp, consisting of the name of the town and a German eagle or some other emblem. After a lot of practice we were able, with a safety razor blade, to carve very passable imitations on a slab of india-rubber taken from the sole of a tennis shoe.

We had heard rumours from time to time that arrangements were being made, through various neutral governments, for prisoners to be taken for walks outside of their camps. These rumours eventually materialized and twice a week we were allowed out for two hours, on parole and escorted by numerous guards. These walks gave us some much-needed

exercise and towards the end of March we had, not only collected an excellent assortment of escaping kit, but we were also comparatively fit physically.

We still had no very definite plans, but, should we succeed in finding a sure way out, Medlicott and I intended to travel by train together in the direction of Holland. At about this time, however, Elliot asked me to join him in a scheme of his own devising, and after some hesitation I agreed. It turned out that there was only room for two of us in this plan, and Elliot was forced to leave Medlicott and Stewart out of it. This somehow led to a violent quarrel—a common enough thing in prison where, after months of close confinement, tempers were generally short—and almost complete estrangement followed between Medlicott and Stewart on the one side and Elliot and myself on the other. For weeks we rarely spoke to each other and we remained stupidly in ignorance of each other's plans.

Elliot's idea was to get into the *Kommandantur* on a Wednesday night, when we would find four or five baskets containing the camp's dirty washing. Two of these, each of which was large enough to hold a man, would be partially emptied and we would be shut in by one of our friends. According to the usual routine the baskets would be carried out early next morning by French orderlies, put on a cart and taken to the station. A railway journey of twenty miles in a closed truck would give us an opportunity of getting out. It sounded most promising, but there were two main objections. First, the German staff slept in a room next to the *Kommandantur* and we should have to be



MEDLICOTT, THE AUTHOR AND GRANTHAM AT WEILBURG, FEBRUARY 1916





careful not to wake them while removing the unnecessary washing ; secondly, the baskets were on the small side and therefore, we should be horribly cramped, possibly suffocated.

I had the good fortune to get hold of the *Kommandantur* key one day when no one was looking, and provided with this Elliot and I made a midnight excursion to see what the baskets were like. Except for the fact that we should have to break the padlocks off in order to get in—and to replace them we bought later some similar locks in the canteen—the scheme appeared sound.

I shall never forget Elliot on this occasion. He wore a sort of tweed cloak with numerous pockets for the various tools we needed and for any loot we might acquire ; it also served as a shade for his electric torch. Creeping round the office, inspecting the baskets and examining the papers on the office desk, he looked for all the world like an old time conspirator, oblivious of the fact that whenever he stooped down a beam of light shone backwards from between his legs, generally striking the windows. I had several bad scares, but fortunately nobody saw the light and, our inspection completed, we crept back to bed.

After a few more preparations we arranged to carry out the attempt during the following week. A day or so later I was in the canteen and noticing a bottle of black hair dye, I waited for a moment when I was unobserved and put it in my pocket. I thought it would be an excellent idea to add to my disguise when escaping by dyeing my hair, which is normally red. Accordingly, on the day before we were due to go, I

applied it in large quantities. The effect, so the directions said, was instantaneous and I was very annoyed when several hours later I could still notice no difference. That night we went to the *Kommandantur* in our civilian kit, accompanied by assistants—Kemp and Grantham. To our great disappointment we found that only the three smallest baskets were being sent ; there was apparently not enough washing to fill the other baskets. The small ones were useless and we had to postpone our plans for another week.

Next day my head itched horribly, and in the afternoon I was sitting outside reading a book, when I noticed that people were staring at me in rather a strange way. Presently some British came along and burst out roaring with laughter. I asked what the matter was and for answer one of them produced a looking-glass. I caught sight of my head and nearly fainted. The dye had worked—my hair was a bright purple !

Washing, scrubbing and brushing wouldn't get that wretched stuff off ; at last I had to get my head cropped before I dared appear in public again. Even then it was weeks before all traces of the dye, which had caused my hair to fall out in handfulls, had finally disappeared. The worst of it was that the Germans noticed that something was up and used to laugh every time they saw me. It was very fortunate that our plans had not succeeded when we intended, as a man with purple hair would have aroused an unpleasant amount of interest.

## CHAPTER IV

MEDLICOTT and Stewart had meanwhile almost completed their preparations, and asked us to delay our scheme until they had tried theirs so as to avoid giving the Germans any grounds for suspicion. We agreed to this proposal and offered our help, which, owing to the absurd quarrel we had had, they did not seem to want, and we even had difficulty in discovering the details of their plan before it was carried out.

Roughly described, the idea was to push a plank out of a certain window at the back of our building, where at one point the wall opposite jutted out to within twelve feet of the building, forming a buttress to the terraces. On top of this part of the wall there was a small piece of level ground, and from it a path led up through the terraced gardens towards the town. As soon as the plank forming a temporary bridge was in position, the lights were to be fused—a comparatively easy matter, the uninsulated wires being attached to the wall of our building at a point close to one of the windows. Medlicott and Stewart would then cross the plank, jump on to the buttress and make their way up the path to a road leading out of the town. If the alarm were raised, an attempt was to be made to haul in the board at once, but if the first two got clear it would be left in position and those of us who were ready could follow fifteen minutes later. We all

thought it rather a risky business, but at any rate it would soon be over once the plank was ready. Nearly all the British were enlisted as accomplices, and Stewart typed out elaborate instructions for each one of them. The top of a bench in the dining-hall was to serve as the plank, and pieces of rope were manufactured from sheets.

The attempt was made on March 18th. The room from which the plank was to be lowered was inhabited by one of the four Belgian generals,<sup>1</sup> whom I have already mentioned. At half-past ten at night Medlicott went in and informed the officer in question of their intention to escape from his window. The general at first did not understand and, when he did, refused to permit anything of the sort. Stewart then tried to explain matters more clearly, although his French was almost as bad as Medlicott's, but the result was the same. At this point, a little tact and the help of an interpreter might possibly have pacified the old man, who was terrified of what the Germans might do to him if he was brought up afterwards as an accomplice; but Medlicott was determined to get out that night and refused to waste time in arguing. The general thereupon threatened to inform the Germans, and when Stewart told him they would use force if necessary the general started to yell for help. There was no alternative. They fell upon him, gagged him and

<sup>1</sup> These officers had been living in retirement in Brussels, were over military age and had not taken up arms at the outbreak of the war. There was therefore no military reason why they should be held prisoners, but the Germans probably wished to swell their list of important captives.

tied him down to his bed. For the remainder of the night he was guarded by one of the accomplices.

The plank and the other gear were now made ready, but Medlicott did not intend to start work on the final stage till about three o'clock in the morning when the sentries would be less watchful, and when, from the appearance of the sky, it would probably be raining. Meanwhile the accomplices were posted at various points and sent in half-hourly reports on the weather, the behaviour of the sentries, and the condition of the general. Eventually Stewart asked me to go in and see if I could do anything for the captive. I made my way to his bedside and explained everything very politely, promising him immediate release if he would be good enough to permit the other two to escape. His gag was then removed to allow him to give his answer, but as he merely bawled out *Assassin*, it was quickly replaced. After this he struggled so violently that a fresh accomplice had to be detailed to sit on his chest.

Just after two o'clock it began to drizzle ; by three o'clock it was raining hard, and operations started. The plank—which, by the way, could not be seen by the sentry as it had been carefully blackened on its under side—was now lowered from the general's window to the window of a room immediately below. This lower window was heavily barred, and the plank was jammed into position at the top of the bars ; here Elliot and Campbell were stationed and fixed the plank securely with the help of two stout wooden pegs. Directly this was done, they signalled up that all was ready. To the outer end of the plank were attached

two ropes which were now made fast to the upper window. Word was then passed down the corridor to put out the lights, which was done by touching the two live wires just outside the building with a third piece of wire. This caused a short-circuit and every light in the camp went out. At the same moment Medlicott and Stewart crossed the improvised bridge, jumped over on to the terrace, and started crawling up the slope.

So far none of the sentries had noticed anything, and all would have been well if the plank had been left in position. But, in his excitement, one of the men in the upper room let go of the supporting ropes and the pegs in the lower window being unable to take the whole weight, the plank crashed to the ground twenty feet below. To me, at the other end of the corridor, the crash sounded like a rifle shot, and it was followed by the blowing of whistles and shouts from the guards. From my window I could just make out two figures crawling up the opposite bank; below the sentries running about getting ready to shoot. It seemed certain that they had not yet seen anything, but any moment they might glance up the bank. To distract their attention, I started smashing the windows with a poker taken from the stove in our room. After I had broken two or three, I snatched at the nearest thing I could find and hurled it out. The sentry below yelled for assistance to the rapidly assembling guards; "a prisoner to escape trying was," he shrieked, "already his luggage out-thrown had been." That man had a funny idea of escaping kit; the object I had just thrown out happened to be a brass spittoon!

I ran back to our room where all the accomplices had gathered, and we quickly undressed and got into bed. The expected visit from the Germans did not occur for some time, however, and Elliot and I went back to see the general. We loosened his bonds, removed the gag and asked him how he felt. As he expressed a strong desire to be left to die in peace, we hurried back to bed again and a few minutes later the Germans arrived. They went into the general's room and found him lying on his bed with various cords around him. He told a pitiful tale of how the British officers had all assaulted him, and how some of them escaped from his window. The Germans were not very sympathetic listeners; they laughed at him and pointed out that the cords were so loosely tied that he must have done them up himself. In answer to his protests they put him under arrest and locked him in his room. Our room was visited next and the absence of Medlicott and Stewart duly noticed. The Germans spent the rest of the night making a thorough search of the camp, refusing to believe that anyone had actually got out. I went back again to the general's room once during the night to retrieve some kit we had left behind. This time one of the Germans saw me and thenceforth they marked me down as an accomplice.

Next day the local newspapers were full of the story. They stated that the escaped men spoke German fluently, and were travelling by train to Holland disguised as Americans. Why this was published remains a mystery as Medlicott spoke no German, Stewart only a few words, and neither of them intended to travel by train.



In reality their plan was to walk some eighty miles to Darmstadt, near which place there was an aerodrome (at Griesheim). Close to this aerodrome there was a hospital from which a wounded prisoner, whom we had met at Mainz, had seen instructional flying being carried out. He had noticed that during the midday interval several aeroplanes were often left standing unguarded, a couple of hundred yards from the sheds. Medlicott's idea was to camp on the edge of the aerodrome and watch for an opportunity to dash out, get into a machine, start up and fly away. It was rather a wild scheme though not entirely impossible, but whatever its chances they were completely spoilt by bad weather, which stopped any flying being carried out for many days in that part of Germany.

They reached the aerodrome on the fourth night out from Weilburg, and stayed there in excellent cover for thirty-six hours ; although, at the end of this time, they were short of food and worn out by the cold and damp. They were unable to wait for a change in the weather, and decided to make for the nearest main line, hoping to get on a goods train and so work their way south to Switzerland. But the very next day their luck deserted them. They ran into some guards near an internment camp who stopped them and, finding that they could not speak German, arrested them. A day later the Weilburg authorities claimed them, and they were brought back.

They were closely questioned as to their method of escape, and the Germans soon found that they could not have committed all the various offences by them-

selves, such as fusing the lights and breaking windows. The British were accused of being concerned and threatened with all kinds of penalties. Suspicion had rested upon me ever since I had been seen in the passage on the night of the crime, and, to avoid further unpleasantness, I confessed my guilt and was removed to jail, where I stayed ten or twelve days.

On about April 10th I was taken to Frankfurt, for a court-martial, by one of the camp officers, Captain von Gölpen, generally known as "John Gilpin." He was one of the most charming Germans I have ever met and invariably treated us well. He was very kind to me that day in Frankfurt, and I felt sufficiently grateful not to make use of an opportunity to escape which he accidentally gave me. It was after the court-martial that the chance occurred. We were to catch a train back to Weilburg at about three o'clock and, as there was over an hour to wait, "John Gilpin" suggested lunch at the station. When we got to the restaurant, I asked to be allowed to wash my hands. I was shown into the lavatory unescorted, and found that not only was it deserted, but provided with a second door leading straight on to the station platform. Some time previously I had got the Weilburg tailor to line my uniform coat and trousers with black cloth and, as I had a very German-civilian-looking leather coat with a fur collar and a dark soft khaki cap, I had only to turn my uniform inside out to appear as a civilian. I should have had plenty of time to disappear from the lavatory, take a ticket and board a train before being missed, but the one thing I lacked was a map of the frontier. This and the thought of "John Gilpin's"

kindness made me abandon the idea and I returned a few minutes later to an excellent lunch.

The court-martial itself was quite amusing, and Medicott, Stewart and I had great fun laughing at the officials. We paid very little attention to the trial and missed a good deal of the usual procedure, although occasionally I had to do some translating, the interpreter being of no use. The whole business lasted about two hours, and the judge evidently took a sensible view of the case as Medicott and Stewart merely got a month's imprisonment apiece and I only ten days. In the afternoon I was taken back to Weilburg jail and the other two went to Friedberg to serve their sentence.

I found jail life very dull, but, at Weilburg, not too unpleasant and on the whole I was well treated. If I had been serving a longer sentence I think I should have succeeded in cutting the bars of my cell window with a fair chance of being able to get away.

On my return to the camp, towards the end of April, I went into partnership with Elliot again, but we very soon realized that the basket scheme had been impracticable, a sentry now being posted inside the building itself at night. It was a great disappointment, but the inevitable result of the recent successful attempt.

The next idea that occurred to us was to dress up as German officers and bluff our way past the sentries in broad daylight. Something like this had been tried elsewhere and had only failed, owing to some slight miscalculation. We planned it out and started to collect the necessary uniforms, a matter of very considerable difficulty. A few minor articles such as cap-

badges and buttons we had already collected at various times—chiefly during midnight visits to the *Kommandantur*—but the main part of the disguise, especially the caps and shoulder-straps, required a lot of time to prepare. The dark-blue caps, we thought, could be sent out from England as they resembled in some particulars the caps worn in peace time by many British regiments. I managed to make quite a passable wooden sword-scabbard, painted black with a tin ferrule, and a French officer named de Blois, of the Spahis Marocains, with whom I had made great friends at Mainz, manufactured some shoulder-straps (which in the German army are made of twisted gold or silver cord) out of cleverly painted string. The long coats were not so difficult to obtain, since the pre-war Russian overcoat was almost identical in colour and only needed slight alterations in cut and facings to be indistinguishable from that worn by the Germans. After a lot of bargaining, one of these coats was handed over to me by a Russian officer, and given to the tailor for the necessary changes. But these preparations took a long time, more than a month, and before the kit was ready we were shifted to another camp.

In the meantime, an attempt had been made which nearly ended in a tragedy. Early in May, Pearson, a R.F.C. pilot, was sent with a small party of French and British to interview the dentist in a town some thirty miles away. On the return journey he managed successfully to jump out of the train. Unfortunately a guard in another carriage saw him and stopped the train, which was travelling slowly, within three hundred yards. A party of German soldiers were also on board

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and these men gave chase immediately. Pearson made for the nearest wood; but, finding his way barred by some farm labourers, he got into a ditch and tried to crawl away. He soon saw that the Germans had found his tracks and were searching the ditch he was in. Further escape was impossible, so he stood up and put his hands above his head. Three of the Germans immediately took aim and fired. The first shot missed, the second hit his right hand, damaging his thumb and blowing off the top joint of his forefinger, and the third hit him just below the heart. Fortunately the bullet was turned by a tin of food and passed between the skin and the ribs, coming out at the shoulder. He was then seized, knocked about with rifle-butts and dragged back to the train, where he was again manhandled. Had it not been for the intervention of the other prisoners who contrived to get near him, he would very likely have been finished off.

He was brought back to the camp without further misadventure and on examination his wounds proved not to be dangerous, although extremely painful. We were all very sorry for him; as his attempt, in broad daylight, was most daring and might easily have been successful but for bad luck.

Not long after this, towards the end of May, we heard that some of the British were to be moved to Mainz and others, including myself, to Friedberg. We decided to put off further attempts until we reached the new camp, and began to make special double-bottomed and double-sided boxes to convey our carefully collected escaping kits. I was able to take most

of the completed portions of the German uniform and a rough suit of civilian clothes, in addition to some tools, maps and a compass. Eventually the secret receptacles in our luggage threatened to become so large that I was forced to leave the German overcoat behind.

Shortly before we left I heard a rumour that my brother (also in the R.F.C.) had been shot down in France and was also a prisoner. I could scarcely believe it at first, but I at once wrote a letter to the commandant asking that he should be sent to the same camp that I was in. I was told that this would probably be done when they had ascertained if he had indeed been captured.

I was sorry in some ways to be leaving Weilburg, for not only was it quite a charming camp—as camps go—but I had had great hopes of escaping from it. So far I had spent over six months in Germany, and all the schemes in which I had been directly concerned had been failures. But for all that I knew escape was not impossible, for at the end of April I had heard from England that Ward had crossed the frontier. Details were at first unobtainable, but the news came through later. During a journey from one camp to another, the train had stopped at a station close to the Swiss frontier. There were very few guards and four prisoners succeeded in escaping. Two were recaptured, but Ward and another eluded the pursuit and crossed the frontier without any trouble.

On June 1st six of us left for Friedberg. The train journey was only about four hours long, and there was no chance of jumping off as the guards were numerous

and forewarned by Pearson's attempt. During the journey we bought some newspapers and read the first reports of the Jutland battle. I shall never forget the look of surprise on the German faces when they saw that there had been a great naval engagement and that some of their ships were still afloat.

## CHAPTER V

**F**RIEDBERG proved to be close to the once-famous Bad-Nauheim and about twenty-five miles north of Frankfurt. The camp lay outside the village in open country and, at the time of our arrival, contained six hundred prisoners of all nationalities, only twelve of whom were British. Some of the latter were keen to escape and with their help we managed to get our illicit possessions stowed away in good hiding-places.

We soon heard that all the British from Mainz—about one hundred and fifty—were due in a few weeks, and a day or two later a Frenchman arrived bringing me a note from my brother, who said he expected to come with them.

Friedberg was not an easy camp from which to escape, the lack of cover afforded by the surrounding country, and the fact that several abortive attempts by French and Russians had made the Germans very wary, adding considerably to the usual difficulties.

The camp was roughly square, bounded by double fences (barbed-wire and a wooden palisade) and guarded by two rows of sentries. It contained two large three-storied buildings and a gymnasium, all of which had been completed just before the war and were to have been used as infantry barracks. In the centre of the camp there was a large parade ground about eighty yards square, and on one side of this lay



a piece of ground one hundred yards long by twenty yards wide where prisoners were allowed to make themselves small gardens, which ran down to within a few feet of the wire fence surrounding the camp. Plots of ground were allotted by a garden committee, or they could be purchased direct from their "owners." A few days after our arrival I obtained one of these plots from a Frenchman, paying him in camp money for the plants and material on the estate.

A week later, the party of British from Mainz arrived and I met my brother whom I had last seen on leave in England a year previously. Elliot and Campbell were also among the party and we at once assembled to consider possible means of escape. *Faute de mieux*, a tunnel seemed to offer many chances of success; it was always a good way out, since one could take a large quantity of kit and choose the best time of the day for the actual escape. We explored the whole camp for a suitable spot from which to start, the main requirements being soft soil, a short distance to dig, and cover from the Germans. The basements of the buildings we lived in were useless as the floors were of concrete, and the gymnasium was out of the question, an unsuccessful attempt having already been made there. At first sight the gardens seemed impossible as there was no cover, except a few small bushes and a row or two of sunflowers planted by the prisoners, but some of the French had started building summer-houses and we obtained permission from the Germans to do likewise.

Most of these summer-houses consisted of a rough framework of wood, with canvas nailed round the

sides, and the roof covered with tarred paper, all the necessary materials being on sale at the canteen. We thought that screened by a shack of this description, we might somehow be able to fool the Germans long enough to dig the tunnel.

The piece of ground I had secured measured fifteen feet from back to front and twenty-four feet from the next garden to the barbed-wire fence. We divided the ground into two equal parts; the part nearest the barbed wire we planted, and the other became the site for the shack, which was to be about ten feet square and just over six feet in height. While the building was going on, we managed to cut away the earth in the centre to a depth of nearly six inches without arousing undue suspicion, and later on this extra floor-space gave us room to dispose of about ten cubic feet of soil from the tunnel. Two sides and the back of the hut were covered with black and white striped canvas, the stripes running vertically, the fourth side, which was the entrance, being provided with a movable hanging curtain of the same material, supported by a horizontal pole whose ends rested on the top of the two sides. The ceiling was also canvas, with the stripes running from back to front, and the structure was surmounted by a sloping roof. It looked like a hideous bathing-tent when finished, but it served its purpose splendidly.

We tried to make it appear that we were designing a rock garden, and to this end all the earth had to be dug up and shifted round, being finally piled in several mounds. Many prisoners of all nationalities were thoroughly interested in their gardens by now, and

the Germans, only too glad to keep us quiet, willingly sold us a large quantity of plants, many sacks of grey granite chips for the paths and all the other materials which we required. A mass of flowers were planted around the shack, preference being shown for the tall quick-growing varieties, which quite soon began to hide the sides. The floor, the entrance and the small path outside were covered with several sackfuls of granite chips, and the tunnel itself was at last started.

At first it was very tricky work, as a shaft had to be sunk to a depth of six feet before the person digging could work out of sight. The front of the tent was kept open all the time and the sentry on the other side of the barbed-wire fence, less than five yards away, or any of the numerous Germans who walked round the camp, could look straight in. This disarmed suspicion, but it made it impossible to dig in the middle of the tent, as we should have liked to do. The real object of our fourth curtain and the arrangement of stripes now became apparent. When work started, the fourth curtain was pushed back till there was a space of little more than a foot between it and the back of the tent. In this space the digging was commenced and, as soon as the shaft was a few feet deep, a trap-door, roughly made out of an old packing-case, was fitted. Every day when work was over, two feet of earth were filled in on top of the trap and the whole floor re-covered with granite chips. Looking into the tent while work was going on, it was impossible to realize that there was a false back, partly because of the smallness of the double space, but chiefly owing to the vertical black and white stripes acting as camou-

flage. The outside of the tent, of course, appeared quite normal.

For the first few days the earth, as it came up from the shaft, was filled into empty granite-chip sacks, and these were temporarily piled up in the space at the back. Then when the coast was clear and the sentry had his back turned, the loose curtain was quickly removed, the sacks emptied evenly all over the floor and the contents stamped down. The curtain was replaced and a fresh man started digging, while granite-chips were hurriedly scattered over the new floor. It was rather nerve-racking work, particularly as one of the German officers and a *Feldwebel*<sup>1</sup> took it into their heads to walk round the gardens every morning, watching the amateur gardeners and looking into the summer-houses. But the camouflage worked well and no one noticed anything.

In five days the shaft was deep enough for us to be able to work completely underground, and the entrance was hidden during working hours with a piece of board thinly covered with earth and granite. The double curtain still had to be used, as the sacks of earth accumulated with such rapidity that there was no room to stow them underground, and we had to continue stacking behind the curtain till the end of the shift.

It took us well over a week to complete the shaft and make the first foot or two of the actual tunnel, and meanwhile we had to get rid of the earth by some new method since it was obviously impossible to go on raising the level of the floor indefinitely. At one

<sup>1</sup> Sergeant.

time we thought of filling the space between the ceiling and the roof, but this would have necessitated putting in a large amount of planking which we could not obtain. The new rock garden offered certain possibilities, although of course it was under the eye of the sentry, but we might be able to dispose of some of the loose earth by piling it on the various mounds we had already made, the only obstacle to this being the difficulty of bringing the sacks out of the tent unnoticed. To add to our troubles the subsoil turned out to be almost yellow, whereas the earth at the surface was nearly black, so that every sackful we emptied outside had to be mixed with, or hidden by, a considerable amount of the top soil. To remedy this and to account for the increasing quantity of loose earth in our garden, we began wheeling barrow-loads of soil of various colours from the other end of the camp, and thus made it appear that our rock garden was going to be on a really large scale. But we could not afford to bring many such loads, and they were only brought when we were certain that some of the Germans were looking and likely to be duly impressed. To lessen the distance in the open across which the sacks had to be carried, a big mound was piled up alongside the entrance to the tent. From now on the sacks were whisked out from behind the curtain and emptied on this mound, which was immediately covered with shovelfuls of dark earth. It was found that the best opportunity for this operation occurred when the guard was being changed and the sentry nearest to us was down at the end of the beat, waiting for his relief. Practically the whole of the morning's excava-

tion of earth would be disposed of during these two or three minutes and by the time the new sentry was in a position to look into the tent, everything was quiet again.

My brother, a R.F.C. pilot named Mansell-Moullin and I built the shack and planned the original lay-out of the garden. To prevent the Germans thinking that there were many people interested, we allowed practically no one else to help us, but as soon as the tunnel was under way our old friends Elliot and Campbell—and later on Fairweather (Cheshire Regiment) and Walker (R.F.C.)—were brought in.

The morning *Appell*<sup>1</sup> was at nine o'clock, and it was inadvisable to work earlier than this owing to the scarcity of people in the gardens which made us too conspicuous. A certain amount of work was done in the garden itself before breakfast, and with Moullin's and Walker's help it began to look more like a garden and less like a rubbish heap. Digging was commenced at half-past nine and continued generally without a break until midday, when the guard was changed and the sacks emptied. At first we had an interval for lunch, starting work again at about half-past one, but to speed up the job we made work continuous by sending a new gang down at noon. The third shift usually began at half-past two and knocked off just before five. During a portion of the summer, *Appell* was put off till after six ; in spite of this it was safer to stop work in plenty of time and we continued closing down at five.

This routine went on day after day, although

<sup>1</sup> Roll-call.

occasionally when the Germans were unusually troublesome in walking round the gardens, we closed down for a day or two so as to make certain that their suspicions were not genuinely aroused. Sometimes, of course, the weather was so bad that it was absurd to be seen sitting in the pouring rain. But, on the whole, we made good progress and the digging was fairly easy.

Each gang consisted of two men; one of them worked at the face of the tunnel, while the other filled sacks and piled them at the bottom of the shaft. As at Weilburg, we found that ordinary table knives were the most suitable tools for digging and, in the very small space available, the shortest and handiest instruments were obviously the best.

We kept the tunnel as small as possible—about two feet in diameter—thereby making sure that the minimum quantity of earth was taken out. The work would have gone a great deal more quickly had we been able to make the tunnel twice the height, and broad enough for two men to work abreast in a sitting position. As it was, the man digging had to work lying flat on his chest with just enough room to raise himself on one elbow. The actual digging was not very difficult, the soil being clay with a very few stones; but it is surprising how slowly a job of this sort progresses. The opening and shutting of the trap-door took quite a lot of time; the working parties had to change into their digging clothes down below before starting work, and the filling and hoisting up of heavy sacks was a lengthy and tiresome business. Moreover, as the tunnel got longer the air—always a

difficulty in tunnelling—became rapidly worse, until it was not possible to work at the face of the tunnel for more than five or ten minutes at a stretch. This meant that the two men inside had to change positions frequently and yet more time was wasted. Nevertheless the average distance we progressed each day was from eighteen inches to two feet, the maximum three feet. We had started building the tent in the middle of June, and the shaft was driven down at about the beginning of July; allowing for the days on which we could not work, some fourteen yards had been completed by August 1st.

At about this time we brought in another worker, a Frenchman named Geerts, who had started a tunnel from his own garden. It was evident that this second tunnel would take much longer to finish than ours and was more likely to be discovered, consequently we suggested that he should stop work and come and join us. He agreed immediately and proved himself to be extremely useful, having done a good deal of mining in the trenches in France. He gave us some valuable advice on the ventilation, on the strength of which we altered the section of the tunnel slightly, making it more in the shape of a Gothic arch with a much larger entrance from the vertical shaft. We also tried, without success, some experiments with air pumps and bellows, but after Geerts's alterations the air improved slightly and we were able to work rather faster.

Every day at the end of the last shift, the gang in the tunnel measured the total length with a piece of cord, and a compass bearing of its direction was also taken. Then from a window in our building, over-



looking the field in which the tunnel would eventually come up, we were able to make a rough estimate of the point we had reached. By the middle of August the tunnel was twenty-three yards long, and we believed that we had gone at least twelve yards beyond the edge of the outer sentry's path.

The question of the exact point at which we should come up had now to be discussed. There was no real cover on any side of the camp, but on the tunnel side, there were a few fruit trees standing in a field of tall corn and we hoped to finish digging before the crops (which were very late that year) were cut. If we could make the exit on the far side of one of the trees, we felt sure of being able to crawl away through the corn, but the greatest disadvantage of our tunnel lay in the fact, that it was almost impossible to reach at night, because after dark we were locked in our buildings. Some one suggested that we should be shut in the tunnel during the last few feet and get out during the night. This idea was quite feasible, but we should be missed on the evening *Appell*, and the Germans would therefore be searching for us before we had got away ; if they had any vague suspicions of the tunnel they might even catch us in it. It was very annoying, but the only alternative appeared to be to do it in daylight, and the success of the whole scheme depended on whether we could get out while the corn was still there to hide us. Even so, we estimated that we should have to crawl nearly a hundred yards before we were effectively hidden from the sentries by a small fold in the ground.

The work was pushed on, and we put the finishing

touches to our escaping kits, replenished and amplified with articles from the canteen. Now that we had got so near the end, we took double precautions. We kept the side curtains, which had never been completely nailed down, hanging half-way up the poles during the greater part of the day, and so allowed any suspicious observer to see right through the tent. More barrow-loads of earth were brought, quantities of cement and stone were arranged on the rock garden and the minimum amount of soil was brought out from the tunnel. Success seemed almost a certainty.

In the corner of the camp nearest to our garden, stood the small three-storied *Kommandantur* building. From its roof some three or four telephone and electric-light wires ran down to a post outside the camp. A certain British officer conceived the idea of concealing himself on the roof by day, and sliding out during the night on the wires. The idea itself was good, and it has been carried out many times elsewhere in the world; but in this instance it was out of the question. The wires ran down at too steep an angle—from twenty-five to thirty degrees; there were far too few of them, and their attachments to the poles were not secure enough. The scheme required a good deal of nerve and plain courage, and the officer in question undoubtedly deserves credit for ever having thought of it, but he did not get very far, as he was caught with all his kit on him soon after he had got into the *Kommandantur*.

The unfortunate part of it all was that this officer was one of the number who intended to make use of the tunnel and the Germans knew him for a friend of ours. The incident of his capture may seem unim-

portant, but it was sufficient to fan the spark of German suspicion into flame, and the immediate result was a surprise *Appell* and a search of the camp. We had warning of this from some one who had overheard the Germans speaking of it, and we managed to close down the tunnel and get everything tidied up in plenty of time. After the *Appell* we were all ordered into our respective buildings, and a small party of German soldiers proceeded to search the camp. Practically nothing was found in the buildings and the authorities then decided to examine and dig up the various gardens. This procedure was rather disturbing, but it caused us no real anxiety. There was nothing suspicious in our tent or garden, and the trap-door was two feet below the surface. Only the day before one of the Germans had come right into our tent on some pretext or another and had looked around for a minute or two; although the double curtain was in position at the time and I was behind it, he had noticed nothing, and we felt confident that the search party would not find the trap-door.

The digging and searching in the garden continued for about an hour, during which time Geerts's abandoned tunnel was discovered and some civilian kit belonging to various other prisoners brought to light. We could see from the top-story of the building that our garden had been almost completely dug up—in some places to a considerable depth—and we wondered for how much longer they were going to continue.

At last the signal to stop work was given, and we saw parties of Germans pick up their tools and come back to the N.C.O. in charge. But in our garden they

apparently did not hear the order to stop ;<sup>1</sup> for fifteen seconds more we could see two men wielding picks at the back of the tent. Some one shouted to them to stop, but the next moment it was too late. One of them called out something and a crowd gathered round him ; a man was sent off running to fetch an officer. Soon several men started again frantically digging up our garden and then, by the orders of the officer, the tent was pulled down and smashed up. At that, we finally realized that our poor tunnel was done for.

<sup>1</sup> We were told later that this was actually the case.

## CHAPTER VI

**T**HE Germans only dug up a small portion of the tunnel and then sent a man down to measure it. Another man was made to go outside the camp and mark the exact spot where the tunnel ended. We could see him pace out the distance and then stand under one of the trees ; we had done even better than we had thought and another two or three days would certainly have seen us out of the camp.

To say that we were disappointed would be putting it mildly. Digging the tunnel had not been very amusing work and the continuous anxiety, combined with the fact that the whole of each day had to be spent either in the tent or in the tunnel, had proved most irksome. The result had been to make us keener on finishing the job and getting away, and now that we saw all our labours brought to naught, captivity seemed even more unbearable than before. For the next few days the tunnel gang wandered about like lost sheep, for we had all been so concentrated on the work that we had taken no part in ordinary camp life and we found that we had nothing to do, it was but a small consolation to think that we had made a tunnel twenty-five yards long, and that thanks to the trap-door and the camouflage of the double curtain we had kept the Germans in ignorance of our plans for a month and a half. The only remedy was to try again.

After one or two representatives of the tunnel gang had spent a few days in arrest, we reassembled and talked over half a dozen suggested schemes, eventually deciding to look more closely into three of them. First, there was the washing-basket scheme, but the baskets in this camp were far too small to be of any use and the only hope was to get smuggled into the closed van which came into the camp to collect them. For many reasons this was very difficult and before we could try it at all another party of British had made the attempt without any success.

A thorough inspection of both main buildings was then made to see if there was any chance of breaking through the basement walls, and digging a short tunnel. The advantages of this idea were that we should be able to work and escape by night. One of the basement rooms in our building offered some possibilities; it was used as a store-room and the Germans seldom entered it. A wooden paling, through which we were able to force our way, shut it off from the corridor. Having settled on the corner in which we should start work, we began by loosening the bricks with the help of a short crowbar—a relic of Weilburg days. After a few days' work it became obvious that it would be too long a business and the difficulty of disposing of the earth would be almost insuperable. In the other building, mainly inhabited by Russians, there was considerably more chance of success as there was no concrete in the basement and the Germans rarely visited any of the rooms. But a tunnel had already been started there by some Russians who were rather naturally averse to having any suspected

characters in the scheme, for after the digging up of our garden the Germans had developed the unpleasant habit of following us round the camp all day long.

The next plan we worked at was one which I still believe had the least chance of complete success—and offered more prospect of getting those who tried it seriously injured—than any other scheme in Germany. Roughly described, the idea was to try and swing out from our window on the first floor to beyond the second line of sentries. This was to be done by means of a rope attached to the top of a pole holding one of the powerful electric lamps illuminating the camp. A rod twelve feet long was to be pushed out of our window, which was exactly opposite an electric lamp, and a noose slipped over the top of the lamp pole. From this noose two ropes ran back into our room. Hanging on to one of these two ropes, one of us would then be lowered from the window, carrying the second rope coiled up. As soon as this man reached the electric-light pole, he would uncoil the rope he was carrying and slide down it to the ground. As the pole stood on the outside of the wooden paling, once we were on the ground we had no more obstructions to face and only a possible chase in the dark by one of the outside sentries.

It was essential that the moment the noose was in position the lights should be fused. This was a difficult business as we were not sure whether the electric wires, twelve feet away from the building, were insulated or not. If they were uninsulated, the lights could be put out by means of another long rod carrying a piece of wire, with which both electric wires

would be touched simultaneously, thus causing a short circuit. All that would then be needed was wind and rain to drown what noise we made. My brother and I were to try it together, and of course any of the old gang could follow on if our escape was successful, but it was difficult to believe that the two of us alone would not attract some attention and alarm the guard. We set to work to make the necessary ropes, for which we used the old canvas from our tent (which was still lying wrecked in the garden) cut into strips and plaited with four strands. The ends were spliced together and bound tightly with string. About fifty feet of this rope was made and carefully tested to carry the weight of four men. The rods were made of bits of the framework of the old tent. It was suggested that one rod would be sufficient, but as the lights had to go out the very instant the noose was fixed on the lamp standard, two were considered essential. It was not an easy matter to make these rods as they had to be rigid and at the same time very light and narrow, but after many trials we were at last satisfied with them.

Our kit, having been completed and made ready for the tunnel, was still intact and nothing else was needed before we made the attempt. When my brother came out of arrest, where he had spent a week in connection with the tunnel episode, it was voted we should try at once, the weather being suitably bad. At the same time it was rumoured in the camp that our rooms were again to be searched. How the various camp rumours started we seldom knew, but they were very often correct. In any case there was no time to



be lost, and on September 3rd we tried to put our plans into execution.

Unfortunately the weather improved rapidly at the last moment and we were faced with the awful prospect of a fine night. After ten o'clock, when the Germans had gone the customary rounds in the building, we warned the necessary assistants—Elliot, Campbell, Fairweather and Kemp—and started the final rigging-up of the poles and ropes. The pole which was to fuse the lights was taken to a room immediately above ours, where one could get a better view of the wires, and the man who was to do the job was told to put out the lights the moment he saw the noose in position.

As in Medlicott's scheme at Weilburg, we were to try between two and three o'clock in the morning, when the sentries were likely to be fairly sleepy and less watchful, but we badly needed wind and rain. As the night wore on the weather became finer, until it was one of the calmest, quietest nights imaginable. Then just after midnight a slight breeze sprang up and we began to have hopes. We started pushing the pole out of our window, but almost immediately we had to withdraw it; the sentries were too alert, and I am almost certain one of them actually caught sight of us. There were four of them who were dangerously near and could easily see or hear us, not to mention several others two hundred yards away who might possibly give trouble. The breeze instead of improving died down again, and by two o'clock there was once more complete silence. We waited until well after three, and then as it began to get light we

packed up the gear and went to bed, intending to try on the next night and on every night until we got suitable weather.

But next morning came the rumoured search. We had been unable to find a suitable hiding-place for the ropes and one of the poles, which were rather poorly hidden behind some boxes in a corner. The Germans seized them with great jubilation (although they had no idea what they were for) and carried them off in triumph. Fortunately they did not get our civilian kit, and we felt that we had been let off rather lightly.

While the Germans were searching, the officer who accompanied them—a bespectacled young bouncer, nicknamed “Gig-lamps”—suddenly asked us :

“Do you want for to go out, jetzt?”

We looked at him blankly, and understanding him to mean did we want to leave the room while he carried on with the search, naturally answered yes. At this he almost exploded and screamed at the top of his voice :

“You cannot escape, you are brisersons of war!”  
A statement which caused us much mirth.

This search ended the “rope scheme” and I may as well admit that I was heartily glad to have finished with it, for it seemed almost certain that one of the four sentries on that side of the camp would manage to get a shot in at close quarters while we were half-way out.

The old tunnel gang held a council of war on the day after the search to talk over further methods of escape. Whatever we did would have to be done

quickly, for the month was now September. We were not well equipped against cold and it was a long way to the frontier. A trek in late autumn or early winter was therefore to be avoided if possible, but the more we looked round the camp the more convinced were we that the schemes most likely to succeed were either those which allowed one person to get away, or else were of the same dangerous type as the "rope scheme."

On the whole the best plan was for me to go out dressed as a German officer. It had often been suggested, but I had not wished to try completely alone, and, in addition, it had always seemed impossible as there were only three or four German officers in the camp, all of whom were well-known to the sentries. It was given a trial because we were short of other ideas, and we started on the uniform.

I had still got the odds and ends from the uniform begun at Weilburg, the principal things lacking being a cap and a pale grey overcoat. A Russian friend of ours was persuaded to ask for a new overcoat through the French tailor, who had to get permission from the Germans to procure the necessary material. But the authorities made a lot of bother, pointing out that the only cloth resembling the Russian stuff in any way was that out of which the German officers' uniform was made. This, of course, was just what I wanted, but eventually it was refused and I had to start again negotiating with the Russians. I obtained one at last and gave it to the French tailor for the necessary alterations. He had to work in secret and consequently took a very long time, besides which the coat was old and shabby and I was not sure whether it

would pass muster when it was finally ready. The cap, too, proved almost impossible to procure and we were beginning to despair of getting the kit ready for months, when a great stroke of luck put us in touch with everything we wanted.

Walker and Fairweather had been working on this same scheme for many months at Mainz, where there was a distinct probability of success. They had gradually obtained almost all the necessary kit for German officers: dark blue mess-caps from England, grey overcoats from the Russians, tin sword-scabbards and badges (home-made). They had succeeded in smuggling all this gear into Friedberg, although the overcoats, which had not yet been altered, were actually seen and passed by the Germans who probably thought they were presents or souvenirs from the Russians. And this splendid kit was lying idle. Walker had other plans just then and did not fancy the chance of using the German uniform at Friedberg, while Fairweather—who thought the scheme was possible—could not speak German.

Walker, by the way, intended to get into a rubbish tub, and be carried out and dumped into a heap of refuse just outside the camp. More rubbish was then to be tipped over him by the French orderlies, who were employed on this job, and he was to remain hidden until the sentries had moved off when he would be able to make a dash for freedom. Unluckily, in this particular camp it was no good; the sentries were too watchful. He tried the plan one Sunday morning and was successfully tipped out, but before he could be covered up he was spotted by one of the guards and

hauled back to camp. He was given the usual fourteen days' imprisonment and, on leaving the camp for jail, handed over to us the whole of his German kit, saying that we were to make whatever use of it we could.

Fairweather and I now had almost complete sets of uniform which, with the help of the tailor, could be made perfect. I began to think that it might be possible to rig up a third person either as an officer or a soldier, but as yet we had no very definite scheme as to how we were to get out.

The details of our uniforms still needed a good deal of care and thought. Such things as buttons and cap badges took a lot of time either to collect or to make satisfactorily. Fairweather's cap badges were made out of metal trouser buttons, filed flat and painted with the German colours, whereas mine were real ones, captured in the *Kommandantur* at Weilburg.<sup>1</sup> Plain brass buttons for the overcoats we bought in the canteen; they answered the purpose quite well as many of the Germans were wearing them. The shoulder-straps on Walker's coat were somewhat better than the ones made at Weilburg and, covered very neatly with silver paper, looked most realistic. For footwear, we purchased in the canteen<sup>2</sup> some very yellow and expensive boots with leggings to match.

With our kit thus nearing completion we com-

<sup>1</sup> The German cap badge was a small round disc about half an inch in diameter, having on its surface three concentric circles of red, white and black.

<sup>2</sup> At this period of the war, the camp canteens sold, at exorbitant prices, almost every commodity except civilian clothing and food.

menced mapping out a more detailed plan of escape, and towards the middle of September a series of events occurred which greatly increased our chances.

The first of these events was the arrival of two new German officers in the camp. Then there was an inspection of the place by a Red Cross Commission, followed by a party from the American Embassy. Next came another Red Cross Commission from some other neutral country, and finally a visit by various German officers and civilians. All of these different parties came to see the sanitary conditions and the régime under which the prisoners lived at Friedberg, the camp being one of the cleanest and healthiest in Germany at the time.

Obviously, one result of these visits was that the sentries no longer knew by sight each person who entered and left the camp. We noticed too that none of these strangers had to show passes and, as far as we could make out, there was no password to be given. Most of the visitors came and left by the main gate between the two principal buildings, but once or twice some were seen to leave by a small door near the *Kommandantur*. We watched this door on several occasions and soon became convinced that it would be possible for us to get the sentry to open it, if our disguise was sufficiently perfect.

## CHAPTER VII

A FEW days later we got an inspiration for the general idea of our scheme from another small party which visited the camp. It consisted of an officer, a N.C.O. and a civilian. They apparently made a rough survey of the camp, inspected the covers of the drains, and left by the side door near the *Kommandantur*. We decided that our own party should be arranged on much the same lines—Fairweather and I as German officers, my brother as a civilian—and from that time on we styled ourselves "The Drainage Commission."

The first question was how we were to get across the camp from our building to the gate. We could not risk leaving our room and walking the whole way in German uniform, there were too many Germans about who might know us by sight. Possibly it would be best to transfer our kits to one of the gardens, dress there, and then walk straight to the gate. But even this was not good enough as the Germans still wandered round the gardens each morning, and it would be particularly unwise for us to be seen in that part of the camp.

A better plan seemed to be to dress in our quarters, concealing our German uniforms with khaki overcoats and covering our legs with ordinary khaki trousers. We would then be sure of getting safely to the far side

of the camp where the gate was, although we still had to find some means of getting rid of our khaki kit without being observed. Eventually we hit on the idea of using the *Kommandantur* itself as a changing-room.

The *Kommandantur* was a small, square three-storied building, standing in a corner of the camp not far from our late garden. It contained the usual clerks' rooms and commandant's office, and in addition the censor's office and the pay department. It was quite usual for prisoners to go to these two latter rooms in the mornings, to see about letters or to obtain camp money. The building was surrounded by a little garden enclosure of its own through which ran a gravel path, bringing one to a short flight of steps leading into the house. At the top of these steps was a hall from which doors and passages led off in different directions. On the left there was a short passage and then the pay-office door. This passage was very dark and had two swing-doors at its entrance, making it an ideal changing-room. There was little chance of our being surprised there, it would only take a moment to throw off our overcoats, and then two German officers and a civilian coming from the *Kommandantur* would seem the most natural thing in the world.

To accelerate our quick change, we decided not to wear complete khaki trousers, but only small pieces of trousers from just above the knees downwards. We cut up some pairs of old slacks, tacked the short lower halves to our real trousers just above our German leggings, and found that with a long overcoat they looked perfectly natural, while only a sharp tug was



necessary to remove them. It was arranged that Elliot, Campbell, and a new-comer named Collis would act as assistants, precede us to the *Kommandantur* and help us off with our coats and trousers. Further to improve my appearance, I was to have my hair cropped short on the morning of the attempt and while passing the guard, I was going to wear spectacles. Fair-weather's appearance did not need alteration as he had no very noticeable characteristics—in my case, red hair—and my brother was sufficiently disguised by his civilian clothes with a felt hat pulled down over his eyes. It was unlikely that the sentry would have seen any of us before and, the other two would be walking close behind me so the sentry's gaze would chiefly fall upon me; we therefore concentrated on my disguise.

We went over all the details carefully and held several rehearsals in our room. The difficulty of stowing away sufficient food for the journey was evident, and to overcome this we made a set of flat body-belts fastened at the waist. Into these belts we carefully packed various concentrated foods, every tin of meat lozenges, every packet of chocolate, and every biscuit, being sown in place to prevent them slipping down and forming an unnatural bulge.

We disposed of most of our food in this manner, although we realized we were going to look very fat with all these things underneath our civilian clothes, which themselves had to be worn under the uniform. Nevertheless we fancied that we would not be going beyond the usual standard of German corpulence. But even so, we had maps, compasses, haversacks

and water-bottles and extra food for which no place had yet been found. We put these, as well as a spare pair of boots and a small flask of brandy, in a tin box the size of an attaché case, wrapped in brown paper and tied up with string. My brother, who was supposed to be a sort of clerk, or perhaps an "Assistant Drainage Commissioner," was to carry it. As soon as we had finished these preparations and the uniforms were ready, we had a final dress rehearsal in our room, watched by some of the old tunnel gang. Every one agreed that the affair ought to be a complete success.

It was now time to discuss our plans for getting away once we were out of the camp. I had originally intended to go by train, but my brother and Fairweather insisted on walking and, against my better judgment, I was eventually persuaded to give up the train idea. The nearest frontier from Friedberg was the Dutch (about one hundred and fifty miles as the crow flies), but as the journey involved crossing the Rhine and making many detours round thickly populated districts, we thought it best to make for Switzerland—a distance of over two hundred and fifty miles; Fairweather, however, resolved to go alone and to Holland. We obtained an excellent set of maps to Switzerland from Geerts—the Frenchman in our tunnel gang—who had somehow managed to get them sent out from France. I also received some maps and a compass from Ward (who, it will be remembered, had escaped in the spring) concealed in a tin of biscuits which I contrived to smuggle out of the parcels office; but these maps being for the Holland route, I passed them on to Fairweather.

At last everything was ready and we arranged to make the attempt on September 25th. Early that morning I had my hair cropped, and then all our kit was brought out from various hiding-places up in the roof of our building. Just as we were beginning to change our clothes an orderly came in to say that one of the German officers wanted to see me. We were much perturbed and I wondered if rumours of our plans had somehow got round to the Germans. I dressed again and went down to the office, where I was told that I was on the list of prisoners to be inoculated against cholera and typhoid that morning. Fortunately the camp doctor had not yet arrived and I managed to get away almost at once, although of course my German-looking hair-cut was noticed. I heard afterwards that the German officer in question remarked to one of his subordinates, that he wondered why my hair had been clipped and that he felt sure I was going to try to escape. Luckily he took no steps to prevent us.

We hurried on with our dressing and by ten o'clock we were ready, with our khaki overcoats and half-trousers over the German kit. We looked remarkably stout, but, as it was a cold, misty morning and every one was wearing thick clothes and heavy overcoats, we were not very noticeable. Our three assistants preceded us to the *Kommandantur* carrying our German caps hidden under raincoats. Then, as soon as they signalled that the camp was more or less clear of Germans, we sallied forth one by one. Each of us went through the gardens by a different path and entered the *Kommandantur* enclosure at short intervals.

There were a few prisoners going in or coming out of the building and the usual sentry on the gate, but otherwise there were no Germans about and everything seemed favourable.

We walked in up the steps and turned into the dark passage. Campbell and the other two at once took our overcoats, wrenched off the half-trousers and gave us our German caps. We made a hurried examination of each other's kit to see that everything was still correct and walked out of the sheltering passage.

As we reached the steps, I seemed to realize for the first time the utter absurdity of our position. Here we were, British prisoners of war, dressed in ill-fitting German uniform, about to demand an exit from the came in broad daylight. Now that it was too late to turn back, the whole scheme seemed ridiculous. We were certain to be caught and made to look thoroughly foolish ; possibly we might even be shot at. Why on earth had we ever thought of anything so stupid ?

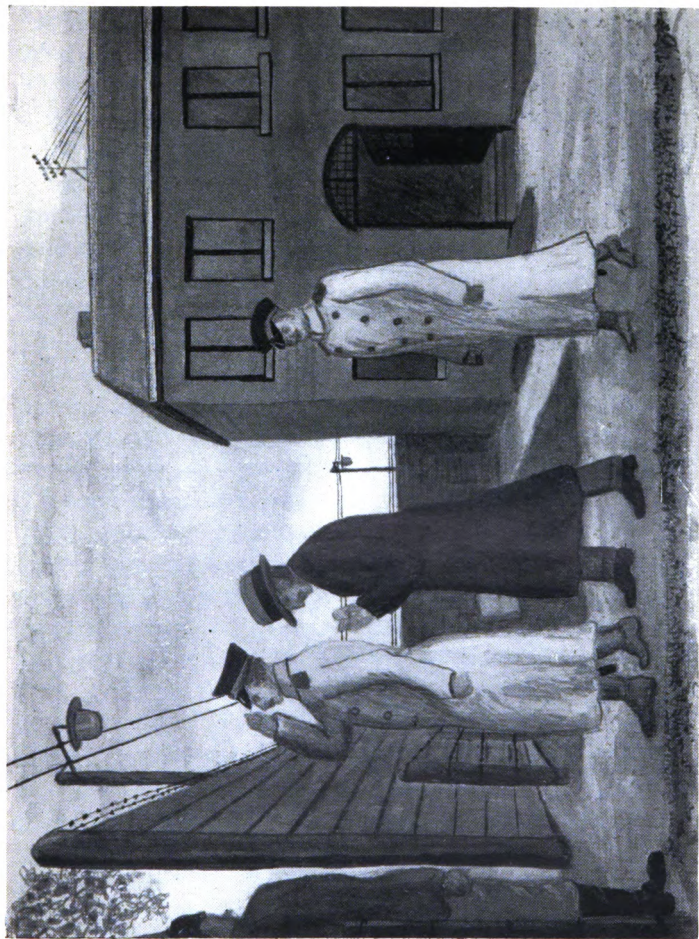
I went on walking more or less mechanically, and we went down the steps and turned to the right out of the building. I was positively trembling with nervousness, when just at that moment several British officers passed us. They glanced up, obviously without recognizing us, saluted and went on. This steadied me a bit and I fancied the other two felt the same. The gate was twenty yards off and the sentry on duty was talking to a N.C.O., while a third man was only a few yards away. We walked quite slowly towards them and, as arranged, I began talking loudly to my brother in German. I talked about various alterations to camp buildings and improvements to the drains, while

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my brother took down my observations in a notebook and occasionally murmured "Ja wohl, Herr Leutnant!"—generally at the wrong moment.

Our progress was a veritable triumph. The Germans near the gate sprang to attention; the man in charge jumped for the key, rattled it in the lock and threw open the gate. Some workmen doing a job on the *Kommandantur* building stood up and took off their caps. I nodded and answered the salutes, still talking nonsense to my brother, and we strolled on with Fairweather just behind us. The gap in the barbed-wire fence was reached; the sentries, still standing stiffly to attention, were passed and the next moment we were outside. At that very instant I heard a strange gurgling noise coming from my brother and I looked round in alarm, thinking he might be on the verge of collapse. To my surprise I found that he was merely shaking with laughter! I was glad somebody could see the joke; personally I felt extremely uncomfortable and by no means safe.

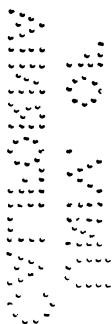
A path with a few steps down brought us to the road and on reaching it we turned to the left. There was a considerable distance to be gone before we could reach cover and the only way was to follow the high road between Friedberg and Frankfurt-am-Main. Although we were now completely below the level of the camp, we were still under the observation of the outer sentries and we had to continue to go carefully. I went on jabbering German, in case anyone should be watching us, and occasionally we managed to whisper a few remarks in English. Fairweather was lagging behind and we found it necessary to slow down considerably to allow



ESCAPE FROM FRIEDBERG, SEPTEMBER 25TH 1916

*From a sketch by the Author*

DAY OF  
COURAGE



him to keep up, his kit being so tightly fastened that he had great difficulty in walking at all. Fifty yards from the gate we had left, there was a track on the right leading directly away from the camp. We had hoped to be able to follow it, for it was evidently a short cut to the woods, at this point only two or three miles away. But just as we were about to turn off we noticed some soldiers coming out of a building used as a guard house and lying close to the track. It was too risky to walk past all these men, some of whom might know us by sight, and we were forced to continue along the main road.

The next three or four hours were agony to us both mental and physical. The morning mist cleared away, the sun came out, and in our double kit of uniform and civilian clothes we suffered greatly from the heat. The tightness with which our food belts were tied on prevented us from going fast, and Fairweather, in particular, was impeded by a string which cut into his chest and shoulders. Apart from this we were seriously worried about our position, for we could find no branch roads or even tracks leading towards the distant woods and the high road was absolutely straight and devoid of any cover. We felt extraordinarily obvious in our German garb and it seemed certain that the few passers-by must guess what we were and raise the alarm. We could hardly believe that we had left the camp without attracting any attention, and every few yards we looked furtively around expecting to see the pursuit in full cry. At the end of two hours, however, we had covered about five miles and there was still no one in sight.



Just as we were about to enter a small village we found a track leading west in the direction of the woods. We took it at once as it was now essential to get off the main road. At first the track was good and led us straight through the open fields towards the hills, but at length to avoid some farm buildings we were forced to abandon it and take to the fields themselves.

The worst part of the morning's ordeal, we soon found, was yet to come. We had already seen a few scattered peasants working in the fields, but on breasting a slight rise in the ground we suddenly came in sight of several lines of men, women and children, stretching right across the way we had to go. It was impossible to get round them without wasting valuable time and there was still absolutely no cover that could afford us a safe refuge. The only thing possible was to brazen it out and walk straight through the middle of them, following the shortest and best tracks to the woods now only a mile away.

The next half hour proved finally how excellent was our disguise and general appearance, for from all sides we became the objects of an intense scrutiny by what seemed like the entire population of that part of Germany. In every direction we could hear people call to one another, pointing at us; labourers two or three hundred yards away would catch sight of us, shade their eyes with their hands to make sure of what they saw, then turn and shout to others to look. Whole groups would stop work and stare while we passed within a few feet of them. One thing is certain: no German officer had ever taken a stroll over these fields

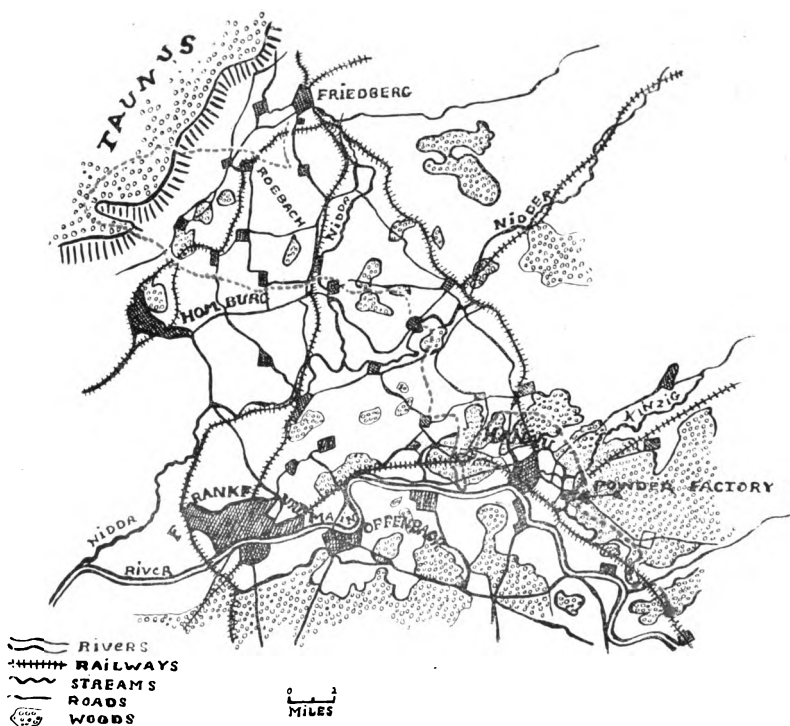
before. The people were amazed, they could not imagine what brought us there—especially on foot. That, I think, was the most difficult thing for them to understand. If we had been mounted, or escorted by a body of men, it would not have been so bad, but we had obviously come many miles across country in a region where there was nothing of any possible military interest, and—well, the whole thing was absurd.

We managed to keep going somehow, and I talked a steady stream of nonsense in German about the war, politics, the latest Zeppelin raid on hated England, and the possibility of buying up the land we were walking over and turning it into new parade grounds, artillery schools, etc. Fairweather and my brother nodded wisely at my brilliant remarks, although of course they understood not one word of what I said. When we were a little way off any particular group my brother would wave his arms, tap his notebook and make strange cackling noises that at a distance might easily be mistaken for German. Then when we were getting near again, I would start contradicting all he might be supposed to have said, thus apparently keeping up a lively conversation. The short distance we had to go seemed unending, but at long last we reached an orchard screened by a low hedge from the open fields. A hundred yards further on the path we followed turned sharply, bringing us to a gate leading into another orchard. We climbed the gate hurriedly, hoping we were not being watched, and found ourselves in a delightfully secluded spot shut in by trees and bushes, and finally out of sight of the crowd.

But we did not know whether some of the more

curious of the people we had just passed might not follow us, and I considered that we ought not to stop just yet. If only we kept on going, the excellent cover we now had would make it easy to throw off any pursuers. Fairweather, however, was completely worn out by the strings that held his food belt in place. The strings, very irritating at the start, had slipped during the long walk so that now they were tight around his neck, nearly strangling him at every step. He told us that he must get rid of the string and have a short rest before continuing, pointing out that there was no need for us to wait, now we had reached the outskirts of the Taunus forest, for we had come to the parting of our ways; his route lay north-west towards Holland, and ours south to Switzerland. There was no time to argue and we said a hurried good-bye. My brother and I watched him crawl—a strangely pathetic figure in spite of the brave uniform—into the centre of a dense patch of Indian corn growing alongside the path, and then we made off at our best pace. A few minutes later we reached the fringe of the woods and headed straight up a steep slope, aiming for the thickest part of the forest. We saw nobody and, after making one or two detours round small farms and foresters' cabins, we met with no further obstructions and rapidly put a lot of ground between us and those awful fields.

About half an hour afterwards we were apparently some two hundred feet above the level of the plain and well into the dense forest. There was no sound of anything resembling pursuit and we were right off the beaten track, so calling a halt I proceeded to get rid



SKETCH MAP OF ESCAPE FROM FRIEDBERG



of my German uniform. My overcoat, leggings, dummy sword, cap and uniform collar were soon buried under a pile of branches and leaves. Then the food belts were ripped open and the contents put into two small canvas haversacks, which my brother had carried in his tin box. A muffler and an old black cap completed my shabby civilian outfit. My brother also made a few slight alterations to his kit, making him look more like a workman and less like the smart official he had been on leaving the camp.

After thus completely transforming our general appearance, we got out the maps and talked over the proposed route during a meal of biscuits and chocolate. We felt pleased with our progress so far, and the way we had fooled the Boches caused us a good deal of laughter.

The day was fine and warm ; the woods were very still, and we thoroughly enjoyed lying on our backs gazing up at the sky through the trees, and realizing that we were free—at any rate temporarily.

Somewhere to the west we could hear a low rumbling, like a tired thunderstorm, and with quite a thrill of excitement we realized that it was gunfire on the Western Front. The sound was like the call of a trumpet to us. A big battle was being fought on the Somme ; a great victory was perhaps already won. We too had won a victory ; soon we would be back in the war zone. That day it seemed as though nothing could stop us, and the face of Fortune wore a broad smile.

## CHAPTER VIII

**T**HE stillness of the forest air was suddenly rent by two loud reports, which brought us instantly to our feet, our hearts in our mouths. The same thought crossed both our minds—Fairweather was being fired at. The guards from Friedberg must have been warned and put on to our trail by those peasants. We listened intently and heard far away the sound of voices ; then one or two shouts, followed by another shot.

We waited no more and, gathering up our few belongings, made off at a run. The path we followed took us slightly downhill, adding to our speed, so that, when we paused to listen at the end of some twenty minutes, we found we could hear nothing more. If what we heard had been a pursuit at all, then we had certainly outdistanced it, and perhaps, after all, it was only an unfortunate rabbit being peppered by a local sportsman.

Looking at our map we made out that we should be heading further south again, as we wanted to make sure of leaving the woods and hills and striking the plain as soon as night fell. A grass track took us in the right direction for two or three miles, after which we had to branch off to the left to avoid a quarry where some men were working. We passed two men with a horse and cart coming from the quarry just then

and exchanged "Good afternoon." We noticed that they merely glanced at us, without the long stare to which we had become accustomed in the morning, and we concluded that our present disguise was quite passable.

At about four in the afternoon we felt sure of being clear of the vicinity where we had last been seen in German uniform and we decided to stop and wait until night. There was still plenty of cover and we found a good place on a kind of promontory, giving us an excellent view of the country over which we were to walk that night. The chief landmarks fitted in with some of those shown on our map, and we passed the time trying to work out a course that would take us clear of the rather numerous villages. After that we slept till eight, when it began to be reasonably dark, and after a short meal we started off again.

The first two miles were very easy as we were following downhill paths and there was nobody in the woods, but soon we came to a long string of farms and cottages at the bottom of the hill, where people were still about, compelling us to go very carefully. Caution was particularly necessary, for by now the Germans must have discovered our absence, and the whole district had probably been warned. Any of the roads might be watched and we might meet men on bicycles, or with dogs, in almost any of the villages. Wide detours round any place capable of giving trouble seemed essential.

It was slow and heavy going almost the whole of the night, for apart from having to avoid roads and cut across country, we were also going "across the grain,"



by which I mean we were going at right angles to the main roads and railways and principal streams. This forced us to stop every now and then and make a careful survey in all directions, before coming out into the open to cross one of these obstacles. As bad luck would have it on almost every road we came to, we either saw or heard some one passing and were forced to wait. On one occasion a cyclist passed us while we were actually on the road ; he gave us a bad scare, for we were certain that any cyclist at that time of the night would turn out to be a soldier on our trail. To add to our difficulties we soon found that our map of this district was quite inaccurate and therefore of less than no use. The excellent maps Geerts had given us did not start till south of Hanau, and we had been unable to obtain anything further north other than an enlarged railway map. Fortunately we knew the exact point we had started from at nightfall, and taking a compass course—roughly south-east—we followed it as closely as possible all night.

Towards midnight we crossed the main road to Frankfurt, and a few yards further on we found the embankment of the main line, an express roaring by just as we got there. I remember wishing that I was on it, rather regretting that I had changed my mind about travelling by train. As soon as it had passed, we cautiously climbed the embankment and crossed the double tracks. We noticed some signal wires on the near side and stepped over them with great care, but foolishly enough we forgot that there might be some more on the far side. Those infernal signal wires always make a considerable

noise at any time, but on that night it was simply terrible the way the clattering din seemed to echo and re-echo up and down the line for miles. Half a mile to the north was a signal cabin and, as we slid rapidly down the embankment, a small light detached itself from the glow coming from the doorway, and a few seconds later we heard footsteps hurrying down the track towards us. We took to our heels and ran as hard as we could, impeded by ditches and ploughed field, and dived into a dark mass of trees which suddenly loomed up. Looking round, we could see the figure of a man, lit up by the lamp he was carrying, pausing at the very spot we had just crossed. He searched about for a minute or two and then moved on down the line. As soon as he was out of sight we breathed a sigh of relief, and registered a vow never to cross a railway line again without searching not one but *both* sides for possible obstructions.

The next obstacle, encountered half an hour later, was a canal about fifteen yards wide and apparently fairly deep. Like most other things, it was not marked on our map. We skirted a large farm on its bank, hoping to find some means of crossing, but after wasting a lot of time and getting very frightened at an old white cow we retraced our steps and followed the canal bank southwards. Shortly afterwards we passed through a small village and, much to our relief, found a bridge. We crossed the canal and got out of the village again without incident, except that a score of dogs started barking and kept it up until we were a good two miles away, when another pack from a group of farms on our right took up the chorus. This

barking nuisance always used to occur in Germany and escaping prisoners invariably complained of it. It did not generally cause any trouble, but it was very alarming when it started in the middle of a village.

For the next few miles we followed a road across open downs, practically devoid of houses of any sort. To the south we could see a faint glow in the sky which we fancied must come from Frankfurt. Since crossing the main railway we had seen no landmarks that were marked on our map, and we had no idea how far we had gone. The few signposts, carefully inspected by match light, showed only the names of small villages which were unknown to us. We felt sure, however, of having kept a fairly straight course and we estimated the distance covered by 3 a.m., at over fifteen miles, although a lot of mileage had been wasted in making detours.

Towards dawn we left the open country behind and began to find fields, hedges and coppices again. It was time to look for cover for the day and, after trying various small woods in vain, we saw a fair-sized clump on the top of a hill. After walking right through it we managed to find a thicket on the far side with some dense undergrowth. We crawled in and a few minutes after lying down we both fell asleep.

We woke up about an hour later, feeling very cold and wretched. We ate some biscuits and, as we still had some water, with the help of a small stove and solidified spirit, we made a sort of soup out of dried sausage, hard biscuit and Oxo cubes. This strange mixture was extraordinarily good and quite filling,

and, as our small supply of food had to last us for probably over a fortnight, it provided an economical means of nourishment. We hoped later on to be able to supplement it with vegetables from the fields.

After this meal we smoked our last cigarette. Quite a lot of things had been sacrificed to make our kit smaller when we escaped, and cigarettes had been amongst them. We regretted it now for, with nothing to smoke, time passed very slowly. After making ourselves as comfortable as possible, we spent the day in sleeping and in trying to puzzle from our wretched map exactly where we were so as to plot out the night's march.

During the night we had just gone through we both had a most peculiar feeling that a *third person* was with us. This feeling was especially strong towards dawn, in fact I found myself on several occasions looking round to see where this mysterious third person had got to. Medlicott and Stewart had both told me of the same feeling, and so had various other prisoners who had escaped. Hundreds of people have experienced the same sensations and have generally explained them by saying that it was a Divine Presence leading and helping them on. As far as we were concerned I do not think that the Almighty had anything to do with the course we steered on that night or on any of the subsequent nights—unless, of course, His maps of Germany were as poor as ours. But whatever it was, my brother found himself on two occasions that morning dividing our rations and making sure that there was enough water for three persons. We compared notes on our feelings and came to the con-

clusion that, since we believed that Fairweather had been shot at on the previous day, he must have been killed and this must be his ghost haunting us. We found out later that Fairweather at this time was thinking the same thing about us.

At midday three or four shots were fired in the distance. This time we were not alarmed, as we supposed that they probably came from a shooting party. It turned out that we were right but much to our annoyance we realized that the party was coming in our direction. Game seemed to be plentiful, the shooting gradually becoming almost continuous, and, after occasional intervals, the next shots sounded appreciably nearer. It took several hours for this party to get really close to the wood we were in, but between four and five o'clock we commenced to be seriously worried. The shots sounded less than a hundred yards off and several times we heard pellets spattering through the branches. Our corner of the wood was thick enough to prevent us being seen more than ten yards away, but it was obviously no protection against shot guns and we had no mind to be peppered at this stage of our journey. We lay low as long as we could, then at last, when we could see figures approaching twenty or thirty yards away, we were compelled to move on. Fortunately the course we took lay, for the first hundred yards or so, through fairly dense bushes and we were not seen, although we had an unpleasant feeling of being hunted, accompanied as we were by several rabbits and hares, and even a small deer, also running from those wretched sportsmen.

The main part of the wood consisted of tall trees with no undergrowth, and it was traversed by a track. As we felt we were being watched from all sides we slowed down to a walk and it was lucky that we did so for, on crossing the track, we caught sight of a German soldier with a rifle slung over his shoulder. He was some way off and did not see us so we walked on to a part of the wood where we could make out a patch of dense bushes near the limit of the trees. When we got there it was merely to find that not only was there insufficient cover, but that another German soldier—or perhaps a forester, but in uniform and with a rifle—was standing just outside the wood only fifty yards away. Behind us were the guns; on our right we could hear two men shouting to one another; in front were armed men—it was like “The Charge of the Light Brigade!” On the left only did the wood seem to be clear, otherwise it looked as though we were completely surrounded. We turned off and went on quickly, trying to look as unconcerned as possible and expecting at every step to hear a staccato “*Halt!*” and the click of a rifle bolt. Fortune favoured us and we reached the far side of the wood in safety. There was no one here and, a ditch affording some protection, we sat down and waited. In front of us was open country, with a village half a mile away. We thought of going into the open and chancing our luck by walking straight through the village, but it seemed too risky. At any rate we were still under cover and darkness was only some two and a half hours off.

After an hour or so the shooting gradually died

down and presently, to our left, we saw a small cart and a party of men in uniform, going down a track to the village. We gave them half an hour to get clear, and then got up and went back to our original place. There was a small pool of clean though rather stagnant water near and from it we refilled our water-bottles, empty since noon. Thirsty though we were, we only intended to use this water in an emergency and even then we hoped to be able to boil it first, but water was often difficult to find during an escape and we had to take what we could get. We tried to rest for another hour till it was quite dark, but we were dreadfully bored with waiting and anxious to get further.

At about 7.30 we could stand it no longer and started off. From our map we made our course to be approximately S.S.E. for ten miles, which would bring us just to the north of Hanau where we would turn almost due south. A track leading out of the wood started us on the right compass course and seemed to be deserted. We met two men a short time later, but beyond saying "Good evening" they took no notice of us. Our track eventually joined up with a road and led us into a village which we reached about eight o'clock. It was obviously dangerous to walk through so early in the evening and we decided to go round it to the south. The ground quickly became very marshy and intersected with irrigation ditches. Presently after climbing a fence and crawling through somebody's back garden, we came to the road we wanted. We walked down it for a few yards and then as we saw lights and people ahead we left it and were

forced to take a path through an orchard, which ended in a swamp. After struggling out of this, we reached yet another road, but had gone barely twenty yards along it when we realized that this was the same highway we had originally followed into the village. We retraced our steps and this time boldly walked right through the village. On the far side we found a bridge over a broad stream. We crossed it, fortunately without seeing anyone, and took to the fields again on the far side.

The country now became thickly wooded—much more so than our map led us to imagine—and paths and tracks began to get scarce. There were a good many fences and enclosed woods, round which we had to make detours and into which we were continually blundering owing to the darkness of the night. To add to our confusion we were working on the extreme edge of our strip of bad map, and we were about to come into the country shown on our better map. As might be expected, the edges of the two maps did not fit and we found it impossible to make out our position ; in fact, at this stage we might just as well have been without a map. A rough compass course across country was the only thing we could go by, helped by the lights of Frankfurt showing dimly to the south. The night seemed very long, our tempers exceedingly short, and the wind, bringing with it a fine rain, unpleasantly cold. The only signpost we passed for miles showed various names, none of them on our map, and we were more than ever puzzled.

At about midnight we were on some high ground and the distant lights showed up more clearly. Frank-

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furt seemed to be well behind us to the south-west, and almost due south were what we took to be the lights of Hanau. To keep well clear of the latter place, we made our course due east and pretty soon entered a dense strip of forest through which, owing to the undergrowth and lack of paths, we wandered interminably. The forest having effectively shut out the lights of Hanau and there being no other landmarks, we again relied solely on our compass.

After an hour we imagined that we had gone far enough to avoid Hanau with safety, and we therefore turned south. Sure enough on reaching a clearing we made out the lights of a town to the south-west, and it appeared from our map that we now had a clear course ahead of us.

## CHAPTER IX

**D**AWN found us in a little thicket, providing good cover and apparently an excellent place in which to rest and pass a part of the coming day. We lit the spirit lamp, and made a hot drink with beef tablets and water. There was only enough water for one small drink each and our first care was to find a stream. We had passed one shortly before coming to our camping-ground, and we expected to find it again about a hundred yards or so to our right. Leaving my brother in the thicket, I went out into the more open woods. I had gone barely fifty yards when I saw that the forest ended a short distance further on, and on reaching the edge of the trees I looked out over a wide expanse of open country. Much to my astonishment I noticed a main road just in front of me and, as I watched, a large touring car roared past. The road ran roughly east and west and I felt certain it was not marked on our map; furthermore, the forest ought not to have ended there—on our map it continued for another twenty miles or more.

I went back to my brother with an uneasy feeling that something was very wrong. As we went over the maps and tried to follow our movements during the night, it gradually dawned on us, instinctively more than by any process of reasoning, that we had not passed round Hanau as we had hoped to do but

that we were now just north of the river Main, between Frankfurt and Hanau. The lights we had seen and avoided on our night's march must have been those of some intermediate town—probably Offenbach. We argued the matter and looked at the maps from every conceivable angle. At last, thoroughly disturbed at being more or less lost, we decided to move on through the wood and explore. We had just started to repack our small stock of provisions, when we saw a man coming towards us, dodging behind the trees and carrying what looked like a rifle. Something resembling panic seized us, and snatching up our kit we once again made off at a run.

It was evidently a false alarm and we soon slowed down to a walk. For two miles we retraced our steps and then turned north-east. We were now well inside the forest away from any habitation and therefore safe for the time being, but with only the vaguest idea of our position. Presently we found a road which seemed to correspond with one marked on our map and to take us in the desired direction. Still further on, the road led us into some sort of private estate and then past the front door of a large house. The grounds were literally swarming with gardeners and gamekeepers and we had several bad scares, although nobody seemed to take much notice of us. The only two men who passed close by, contented themselves with a good stare in answer to our "Good morning."

But we had barely got clear of this place and, into the thicker woods again, when we were brought to a stop by a high brick wall of the type we generally have round kitchen-gardens in England. It was no

good climbing over it with the chance of being caught by a gardener for trespassing and we felt safer in the woods. We bore to the left, keeping the wall on our right and using it as a guide. We had not gone very far, when through the trees we saw a man in uniform with a gun over his shoulder. We moved forward cautiously and suddenly caught sight of another man a hundred yards away to our left. At the same moment several shots rang out, and it became evident that we had run into another of those accursed shooting parties. The worst of it was that there was comparatively little undergrowth to hide in. We tried lying in a shallow ditch, but hearing the voices of people coming in our direction, we quickly changed to the only bush near. This, we discovered to our horror, was surrounded by a bed of nettles and wild garlic, and we got severely stung while the smell of garlic was almost unbearable. Nevertheless, as the cover was quite good, we stayed there for about half an hour until the sounds around us had died down. We looked around cautiously and seeing that the German soldier previously noticed had disappeared we walked on.

Towards noon, we reached a gap in the forest, shown on our new map, apparently about three miles wide. As far as we could see the whole of this area was cultivated and large numbers of German peasants were at work. A detour to avoid crossing this space would have added many miles to our route and after a few minutes' hesitation we walked straight across the fields, following a rough cart track. As on the first day, we felt very nervous when passing the

German peasants, but by loudly talking German and greeting them with an occasional "*Guten Tag*," we managed to get through without arousing any undue suspicion. When at last we reached the far side of the gap, we hurried into the woods again and sat down to rest by a small stream.

We had been on the move now for nearly twenty-four hours on end and naturally felt very tired. I think my brother was more exhausted than I, as the very uncomfortable pair of boots he was wearing had made large blisters on his heels. The only remedy he could suggest was to cut large holes in the backs of the boots so as to prevent them from rubbing any more. The result looked quite ridiculous, and for the rest of the journey we were particularly careful to avoid all habitations and villages, for my brother's heels showing through the backs of his boots would probably have caused a lot of curiosity.

After resting by the stream for two or three hours we continued our march through the forest in the late afternoon. Presently we came to a main road and then a double line of railway, both of which we crossed with great caution, although this did not prevent us from being seen by quite a large number of people. In fact whenever we reached roads or railways, all the local inhabitants seemed to have gathered at the very point at which we had chosen to cross. The crossing of this particular road and railway was most encouraging as it helped us to find our whereabouts and to show us definitely that we were now on the new and accurate strip of map. Every now and then we passed large clearings in the

forest and at the end of one of these we could see, half a mile to the south of us, a cluster of houses and, on comparing their position with the details on our map, we agreed that we must at last be on the outskirts of Hanau. Another two or three miles further to the east and we turned practically due south, estimating that we had rounded the bend of the river Main. Another encouraging sign was the river Kinzig, which we forded at about this time although it was some twenty-five yards wide and about five feet deep. As luck would have it, just as we were right in the middle of the river and struggling against the rapid current, we saw a middle-aged man, wearing a top hat and dressed like a typical German professor, walking along the bank a little way off. Anything more out of place than his appearance in the middle of this forest it would have been difficult to imagine. He gave us no trouble, but on seeing us he seemed much perturbed and hurried off in the direction of Hanau. We wondered if he was also a prisoner escaping, who had solved the difficulty of obtaining headgear.

On the other side of the river we took off most of our clothes, squeezed out as much water as we could, and then hurried on as fast as possible, endeavouring to get warm again. At sunset just as we were walking down a very easy track in the middle of the pine forest, feeling thoroughly secure, we very narrowly escaped running into a barbed-wire entanglement and three or four men in German uniform, only a hundred yards ahead of us. This sudden appearance brought us to a full stop and we disappeared into the under-

growth as quickly as we could. After crawling on our hands and knees for about fifty yards, and peering through the trees, we made out the place to be some sort of a heavily guarded fortress, with barbed-wire fencing stretching out around it for a considerable distance. There was nothing on our map corresponding to this, and we fancied that it might be a prisoner-of-war camp. Later on with the help of another map we discovered that it was a powder factory. Crawling back through the woods, we made a tremendous detour and eventually got round it in safety.

Just after dusk we had reached approximately the position we would have attained early that morning, had we not lost our way on the previous night. After a short rest we decided to walk straight on, hoping to make up for lost time during the coming night. The weather was still very fine, but it soon became bitterly cold, and somehow or other we could not manage to keep warm however fast we walked, probably because we were getting very tired. At about two o'clock in the morning, after walking steadily for several hours, we felt that we must have at least a couple of hours' rest. We found a safe place, a long way from any paths or tracks and well screened in by trees, where we sat down and tried to get some sleep. One of us, of course, staying awake while the other slept. But thinly clad as we were it was far too cold to sleep, and after a while we lit the spirit lamp and made some hot soup. This did us a certain amount of good, but the contrast after the drink was finished seemed almost worse. Consequently the next step we took,

a very unwise one, was to light a fire. Being in the middle of a large forest and miles from any habitation, it was probably perfectly safe, and if anybody had approached we could certainly have got a start by running away into the surrounding darkness. We agreed that my brother should sleep first for about an hour whilst I kept up the fire. But the inevitable happened, and after about twenty minutes I felt myself quite unable to keep awake any more and fell asleep too.

Half an hour later we both woke up shivering; the fire had gone out and we were colder than ever. My brother was naturally furious with me for having gone to sleep and we proceeded then and there to make the forest ring with the echoes of a family row. If there had been any German onlooker, I am sure he would have been highly amused at the strange spectacle of two English officers, dressed in the filthiest of civilian clothing, cursing each other roundly at two o'clock in the morning! But fortunately no one heard us and our arguments continued unchallenged. By the time we were more or less worn out with shouting at each other, we felt that it was quite impossible for us to go on together any more, and quite inconsequently decided that my brother should keep the maps and I the compass, and that we should each find our own way to the frontier. After this we got up from our camping-ground and walked on, side by side, without speaking a word.

We sulked on in this manner for about an hour, at the end of which time my brother disappeared. When I say "disappeared" I do not mean that I just lost



him in the darkness, but that the ground actually seemed to swallow him up. I stopped and looked around in amazement, for where a few seconds ago there had been a large and very indignant man there now appeared to be no one at all. Then, from almost beneath my feet, I heard his voice. He had fallen into some kind of a swamp or mudhole and wished to be pulled out. I caught hold of a slimy hand and dragged out a horrible muddy object, only faintly reminiscent of the brother I had just lost. The odour of the mud was like the peppermints—"curiously strong," and, laughter overcoming us, our late quarrel was soon forgotten.

Dawn was now approaching once again and we had to find the usual place in which to lie up for the day. As we had emptied our water-bottle and, during the latter part of the night, crossed no streams, it was important to find water and we were compelled to go on. It was broad daylight and people were beginning to stir before we finally found a suitable coppice close to a small stream. After having eaten a few biscuits and cooked our morning soup, we lay down and slept for the greater part of the day. We were not disturbed by shooting parties, and we had a thorough good rest. By the time the sun went down, we were once more impatient to be moving.

This time we started walking between eight and nine o'clock in the evening and, after passing one or two farmhouses and skirting round a village, we came into the forest again. Here the going was comparatively easy, and we had only to follow our compasses due south. Before starting we had debated the

question as to whether we should cross the Main on that or the following night. The sooner we crossed and got into less-populated country, the better it would be, but by waiting two nights we stood a better chance of crossing where the stream was narrow. There were also more bridges farther south and we therefore remained on the eastern bank. We must have covered over fifteen miles that night and we began to feel that we were making good progress at last, and that our prospects were undoubtedly brightening. We found several fields of vegetables, and reinforced our slender stock of provisions with a few potatoes, a cabbage and a turnip.

An hour before dawn, the forest thinned out again, and we had the same trouble as before in discovering good cover where we could hide during the day and which, at the same time, was reasonably close to water. We hurried on and it was still dark when at length we crossed a brook and filled our water-bottles. On the far side of the stream we saw a dense thicket into which we pushed our way about twenty yards, finally stopping at the foot of a steep slope up which we thought it useless to climb. The position seemed to be perfect for a daytime hiding-place and, being very tired, we did not trouble to look any further.

We slept for about an hour and when we woke it was broad daylight. We lit the spirit lamp and commenced cooking our usual soup composed of Oxo cubes and dried sausage, to which we added a few of the vegetables gathered during the night. As the cooker was heating very slowly, we put a few twigs underneath to speed it up and finally made a small

fire. While this was going on, we heard to our surprise the noise of a distant train. The noise grew louder and louder, until we realized that the train was actually coming through the middle of the forest, and then all at once we saw that the slope against which we were sitting—we had only faintly perceived it in the dark—was the bottom of a railway embankment. The train passed above us, so that we could see the engine-driver and stoker looking down through the trees. It did not seem to matter much that they had seen us and we did not worry about it ; after we had finished our meal, we could move back from the embankment into some other part of the wood.

About twenty minutes later, just as we were going to move, we saw two men coming along the track. As soon as they caught sight of our camping-ground they climbed down the embankment and came towards us. We still did not think there was any necessity to bolt ; our clothes were good and we appeared to be doing nothing wrong by being in the wood. I could talk German if necessary, and I would be able to explain to them what we were doing and where we were going. Besides, if we were to run away, we would have to leave some of our much-needed food, and the men would give the alarm.

When they reached us, the two men were quite polite and unsuspecting. One of them explained that the driver of the recent train had reported at the next station that he had seen a small fire in the wood. As forest fires in that locality had been frequent during the summer months, the station-master had sent these two employés to investigate. I quickly made things

clear and told them our story—previously invented—to the effect that we were munition workers on a holiday from Hanau, enjoying a few days' walking tour. I also said that we had lost our way during the night, and that we did not think there was any harm in cooking food near the railway embankment. To bear this story out, I produced my forged pass, a relic of Weilburg days, duly describing me as a munition worker and bearing my photograph upon it. In addition I pitched them a long yarn about my brother being deaf and dumb, owing to a bicycle accident of a few years ago when he had been run over by a tram in Frankfurt. This piece of embroidery was necessary to explain my brother's ignorance of the German language. Both the men expressed much sympathy—in fact they were almost moved to tears by my sad tale and seemed inclined to let us go without any further trouble. I am quite sure that if at this time I had offered them a couple of hundred marks, they would have been only too glad to see the last of us. But I foolishly refrained, thinking that I might arouse their suspicions by any attempt at bribery.

We were about to move on when another man came along the embankment and down to where we were standing. He announced himself as the station-master, and turned out to be a much more inflammable type of German than either of the other two. He told us we were offending against all kinds of by-laws and regulations and threatened us with arrest. At one moment in his excitement he even pulled out a little bayonet from a scabbard at his side and waved it about in front of us in a most ridiculous manner. By

dint of much argument I managed to quiet him a bit, my brother standing by looking as much like an idiot as possible, and occasionally giving vent to piteous mumbles. The worthy station-master was at length sufficiently appeased to say we should be allowed to go, if we promised further good behaviour. At the last moment he changed his mind and said that, first of all, we should have to go to the station, and make an official report to the effect that it was we who had lit the fire in the wood, and not the forest that had caught fire of itself. Of course I protested, but it was of no avail, and two other German workmen having come up by this time, we could only submit and go to the railway station, thinking that we could probably get away afterwards. We climbed up the embankment, surrounded by a strange collection of railway officials, and marched down the line.

When we got to the station we were taken into an office where we found that the village firemen had arrived, complete with side-arms and walking-sticks, but with apparently no other appliances for dealing with forest fires. We were questioned and cross-questioned, and I had to tell my story over and over again, and show my forged pass to each of the officials in turn. Finally a policeman arrived and the whole matter had then to be re-explained for his benefit. The strange thing was that, during this time, not one of them suspected us of being escaped prisoners.

Finally, when we were beginning to think that the whole affair had been talked out and that we would be allowed to go, the policeman made a brilliant suggestion. In order to check our statements it would

be advisable, he said, to telephone to the munition factory at Hanau where I had stated that we worked. This he immediately proceeded to do, much to our annoyance, with the unfortunate result that he not only discovered that nobody knew us, but that the munition factory did not even exist ! This succeeded in arousing the whole party to a somewhat belated sense of suspicion and every one present became duly agitated. The policeman telephoned to H.Q. for more policemen ; the station-master telephoned to the nearest garrison for a strong guard, and the remainder of the gang contented themselves with shouting at one another and at us. About a quarter of an hour later two corpulent, red-faced Landsturm soldiers, very much out of breath with the unaccustomed exercise of walking, arrived in the office and we were formally arrested.

There was now no hope of our being liberated and, realizing that the game was up, my brother immediately ceased being dumb and started an animated conversation with me, asking what it was all about. I really think this surprised them more than anything else, and when later on I informed them that we were British officers and prisoners of war attempting to escape, they were completely astounded. Funnily enough, in this strange little out-of-the-way station they did not become infuriated at finding that we were two of the hated English. Usually at the arrest of a British prisoner, Germans of all ranks and classes used to fly into a terrible rage, cursing and shouting at the shameless audacity the English " pig-dogs " had shown in daring to escape. On this occasion,

however, I must admit that they were extremely nice and, beyond warning us that if we attempted to bolt we should be immediately shot dead, they did not molest us in any way. In fact they were only too interested to hear our story and to find out from which camp we had come.

After a short interval masses of German policemen began to arrive, and a great discussion took place as to what should be done with us. Instructions eventually arrived from Army H.Q. that we were to be taken back to Friedberg as soon as possible. At mid-day a train came in, and accompanied by four guards we began the return journey.

## CHAPTER X

**A**N hour's journey in the train brought us to Hanau, where we got out and marched through the streets to the headquarters of a local infantry regiment. We were closely questioned on our method of escape and then locked up in the military prison. Up to this time no one had searched us and we still had our compass and maps concealed about us. We realized that immediately on reaching Friedberg we would be searched and, as further concealment would then be impossible, we tore up our maps and threw the pieces, with our compass, down a drain.

In the afternoon a new escort arrived and marched us down to the station, where we took train for Friedberg. The journey passed off uneventfully and most of the way back we slept. Upon our arrival at Friedberg Station we found that the news of our recapture had evidently been well advertised, for there was a large crowd of civilians, soldiers and officers from the camp to watch us. We must have been filthy-looking objects as we marched out of the station and down the main street. Our guards took us to the civil prison in the centre of the town, and there we were locked into separate cells. I heard from the jailer, just before he shut my door for the night, that Fairweather had been recaptured the day before and was somewhere in the same jail.



The next day various German officers came down from the camp to cross-question each of us in turn, and I soon realized that our method of escape had been discovered on the afternoon of the day on which we had got out, owing apparently to several rather excited prisoners talking about it in front of one of the German officers.

What chiefly puzzled the Germans was the way we had managed to get so excellent a set of disguises, and when I told them that we had made the German uniform ourselves, they refused to believe me. I found out from one of the German officers—a particularly good fellow named Dubois, who had been with us at Weilburg—that the sentry on duty at the gate at the time of our escape was in prison on a charge of having accepted a bribe. I believe I ended by convincing Dubois that we had bribed no one, and the man was released.

We were kept in jail for fourteen days pending further investigations into our case, after which we were sentenced to a further fourteen days, and we considered ourselves extremely lucky in getting off with so light a sentence. Generally the Germans managed to trump up extraordinary charges of damage to German property, or of offences against some obscure sections of German military law. A court-martial generally followed and prisoners were often sentenced to terms of many months' duration.

But even the mere four weeks spent in solitary confinement in that particular jail were exceedingly boring. At the outset no books were allowed, no parcels of food, no change of clothing and no smoking.

During the whole month I was only taken for exercise twice, and then only for half an hour each time, and I was only once allowed to have a bath. I realize that all this does not amount to any particular hardship, but at the same time it made an already unpleasant existence as a prisoner almost mentally unendurable. Not being allowed to smoke was perhaps, in this and in similar prisons, the hardest thing of all, and when one day Dubois was good enough to leave me two cigarettes, I smoked them with absolute relish by fractions of an inch at a time, treasuring up the "fag ends" for many days. Dubois forgot to leave me any matches and I could not get them from the jailer, who was a most unpleasant man, and Dubois had told me not to let him know that I had anything to smoke. Fortunately I remembered an old expedient. One of the few objects of furniture in my cell was a large glass water-bottle, and by putting this bottle in front of the small window early in the morning when for a few minutes the sun shone in, I managed to focus a certain amount of heat on the end of a cigarette and by degrees I got it to burn.

Towards the end of October I was told that my brother and Fairweather were soon going to leave for some new camp, and that I would be leaving a few days later for yet another destination. It was most annoying to be separated from my brother and from Fairweather, but of course inevitable. Why the Germans had decided to move the other two first and leave me for another couple of days, I could not imagine, and I naturally felt rather depressed at being the only remaining prisoner of war in the jail.

Prison-life was not entirely without its diversions, for every morning one of the German civilian prisoners used to be sent into my cell to clean the place up. These prisoners were generally of the lesser criminal type, most of them being in prison for some minor offence such as theft. They were most interesting companions and, generally speaking, thoroughly anti-Prussian. They expressed an intense hatred for anything connected with the war, unless a British success had been reported in the papers that morning, in which case they pretended to be very pleased. I spent many amusing minutes with one of these fellows listening to his ideas on Socialism, Communism and Red Revolution, ideas which should by now have won him a high position in the Russian government. At times, indeed, I wondered whether I had not been shut up in a lunatic asylum by mistake. But at any rate this sort of conversation was better than no conversation at all, and it helped to pass the time.

I was allowed to write one letter home from jail, a portion of which I reprint here as it shows how little of my experiences I was able to tell.

FRIEDBERG JAIL,  
*October 27th, 1916.*

MY DEAR —

Whilst sojourning pleasantly—neither toiling nor spinning—in my old haunt the local jug, I have at last found occasion to write you the much desired line. How exactly to begin and how to explain my presence here are matters which require tact and forethought—to avoid erasure by the censor. All I

can say is that the well-known genius of the family has at last come to the fore, and that on the 25th of September—date of glorious and happy memory—the cobbler of Köpenick<sup>1</sup> was completely outdone by the brothers Milne and a third party. More I am unable to say, save that by the evening of the 29th we had again hung up our metaphorical harps, and sat down to weep by the waters of Bad Nauheim.

Well, that should be enough to worry that mighty god, the censor, and I expect he is more or less bound to cut it out since it is the only news I have.

After many demands both in writing and verbally to be allowed to have some books, some extra food and some clothes, I managed to obtain permission for most of my kit to be sent down from the camp. I had never had very much in the way of luggage; it was too great a nuisance to be hampered by an enormous quantity of trunks and suit-cases when travelling from camp to camp. This was in contrast to the ideas of some of the other prisoners who, when they arrived at Friedberg, had as much luggage as a party of American tourists arriving at a fashionable hotel for the season. I remember one officer in particular who came from Mainz with no less than twenty-five trunks, suit-cases and packing-cases!

When my kit was finally sent down to the prison, all that remained of it appeared to be one pair of boots and two or three small bundles of under-clothing.

<sup>1</sup> It will be remembered that a few years before the war, a cobbler from the town of Köpenick, near Berlin, masqueraded as a German officer and successfully fooled the Imperial Guard at Potsdam.

Who had managed to get away with the rest I could not imagine, but I very much suspected the German N.C.O.'s in charge of the building I had inhabited. The only thing I was really very sorry to lose was my shaving-brush, in the handle of which I had managed to secrete about twelve pieces of the French gold obtained at Mainz, which would have been very useful for future attempts.

A few books were sent down with my kit and these helped to pass the time, but somehow or other very little food arrived, and I spent most of each day pacing up and down my cell planning out what I should like to eat if, by the grace of God, I ever managed to get back to the Carlton or the Berkeley.

The rather severe restrictions imposed on us at this prison were largely due to the fact that Medlicott and Stewart, who had been sent here after the Frankfurt court-martial, had succeeded in scaling the outside wall one afternoon while taking exercise in the yard. At that time only one sentry was on duty and his beat extended round all four sides of the prison. Taking advantage of a moment when the sentry was round the corner, they had managed to put an old ladder—carefully left in a tool shed—up against the wall. On dropping into the road outside, they made off down the main street at a run. Very few people were about that day and no one seems to have given chase. Turning down a side street, they came out almost immediately into open country and for some minutes it really looked as though they would get clean away. But as their escape had been discovered a few seconds after it had taken place, a party of

armed men were sent after them on bicycles and caught them up, only a few hundred yards from a large wood where they would probably have been safe for the night. After this attempt, the Germans were very naturally more prudent, and escape from the jail was almost impossible.

## CHAPTER XI

ON Friday, October 27th, I was told to pack up my kit and at about three o'clock in the afternoon, in charge of a German officer and a party of four men, I left the prison. We marched down to the station, where we boarded a train going north. I had no idea of our final destination, but I vaguely imagined that after my various attempts to escape I would be sent to some more remote camp in the interior of Germany. At Giessen we changed trains and this time we got into an express labelled "Berlin," but I did not know yet whether we would go right on to Berlin, or whether we were to get out at some intermediate station.

As was generally the case when one or two officers were being moved from one camp to another, we travelled second class, and I must admit that travelling under these conditions was extremely pleasant. To anybody who would enjoy long railway journeys without the anxiety of looking after luggage, tickets or other worries, I must thoroughly recommend these trips made as a prisoner of war. For one thing, the problem of keeping annoying people out of one's compartment was entirely solved. One did not have to put one's luggage on the seat, or stand at the window making faces when the train reached a station; all this was done by the guards. Positively no one was

ever allowed into the compartment during the journey, the German idea probably being that a prisoner would contaminate an ordinary German civilian, or perhaps infect him with unpatriotic ideas. If there was a restaurant car on the train, food was sent down from it, and on other occasions meals were bought at buffets in convenient stations. One's slightest personal want was attended to willingly by one of the ever-present guards. If, for instance, the carriage became stuffy and one desired to have the window open, a German at once jumped up and helped ; at the same time he would take the seat beside the window, nominally to prevent the all-important prisoner from catching cold, but in reality of course to stop him from jumping out.

This particular trip was one of the pleasantest that I was ever to perform whilst in Germany. Not only was I seeing country a great deal of which was new to me, but there was a certain fascination in the thought that I was going to a new camp, should meet old friends whom I had last seen in France, and where there would undoubtedly be new possibilities of escape. The only objection I had to find with a journey of so great a length was the lack of sleeping-cars : a total of six men in a compartment left very little room for lying down. But if I was uncomfortable the Germans were equally so, and there was also consolation in the thought that one prisoner of war was keeping an officer and four men away from the front.

It was interesting to note the large numbers of Russians—numerous parties of fifty to a hundred,



each guarded by only one German—employed on railway repair work throughout the country. Germany's prolonged stand in the war must have been made largely possible by the millions of prisoners she could use on important work such as this, while her own men were at the front.

The journey was uneventful; I had an excellent book to read and the time passed quickly. We reached Berlin at about ten o'clock on the following morning and had to go across the city to get to another station, where apparently we were again to take a train and go still further east. The German officer accompanying me was as pleasant as could be expected under the circumstances, and decided that this would be a good opportunity to show me the wonders of Berlin. Consequently, on coming out of the Potsdam Station, we got into a one-horse victoria, and with a guard on the small seat in front of me and another one on the box with the driver, we drove solemnly through the main thoroughfares of the capital. Berlin in wartime struck me as being particularly depressing. There was very little traffic on the streets and the shop windows were almost entirely devoid of any articles worth buying. We ended our rather dull drive at the Friedrichstrasse Station, where we had lunch.

At one o'clock we embarked once more in an express train, the carriages being marked "Warsaw" and "Brest-Litovsk." This seemed encouraging, but somehow I could not bring myself to believe that I was actually going to be taken to the Russian front. I again questioned the German officer about our destination, and as he evidently thought we were now far

enough away from any frontier to prevent my trying to escape, he told me : Cüstrin. The name seemed vaguely familiar, but I could not think why, nor could I imagine what sort of a camp I should find myself in. It took us two or three hours to get there, and I spent much of the time puzzling over the name. I remembered vaguely that it was the place in which the young Crown Prince, later Frederick the Great, had been imprisoned as a deserter, and it was from a window of his prison that he had seen his best friend shot. This alone was a depressing thought, but, try as I might, I could not recall in what other connection I had heard the name mentioned.

Presently the train slowed down and steamed across a bridge over a great river, which I recalled must be the Oder. A few minutes afterwards we got out at Cüstrin Station and marched through the town. The main road led to the north and presently we left the town behind and came into open country. I asked how far it was to the camp and was told that it was a very short distance, but I began to doubt the truth of this estimate when the German officer, after much saluting and bowing, left the party and said he was going no further. Soon we passed some kind of an old fort with a short steep road leading down to its gloomy-looking entrance. I ascertained that this was a prison-camp for Russians, which made me feel more than ever glad that I was not a soldier of the Czar. Another four miles, mostly uphill and rather tiring, then, just as we were coming to the fringe of what appeared to be a big forest, we turned off sharply and two hundred yards farther on came to the camp.

With something of a shock I remembered all at once what I had heard about Cüstrin. It was of the existence of this camp—Fort Zorndorf—notorious as the worst camp in Germany. For one thing, it was the place to which various batches of French prisoners had been sent as a reprisal for supposed atrocities committed in prison-camps in France. Secondly, the Germans believed that no prisoner could ever hope to escape from such a place and all kinds of dark rumours were current about those who had attempted to do so—one man had been shot, another had been murdered, yet another had gone off his head in solitary confinement. It was not a pleasant outlook, and on the top of all this I remembered hearing that like most fortresses its main buildings were underground, damp and dark even on the warmest day, so that prisoners rapidly became ill through lack of fresh air and exercise.

I had a good look at it as we approached and tried, from the little I could see, to get some idea of its general shape and size. It was built apparently on the same plan as were most forts of thirty or forty years ago. The highest point of it was scarcely above the level of the surrounding country. It was five-sided and surrounded by a dry ditch some fifteen yards wide and at least thirty feet deep. Nothing else was visible from the exterior save a few trenches and traverses near the summit. The road at the entrance sloped steeply downwards to the bottom of the ditch, where heavy iron gates guarded by two sentries barred the way. Just outside was a brick blockhouse, evidently used by the guards, with em-

brasures for small guns. As we came to the gates, one of them swung slowly open and we were admitted into the ditch. No passwords, no questions asked. It seemed easy enough to get in ; would it really prove to be impossible to get out ? A narrow cobblestone road led across the ditch to the main entrance of the great mound which now towered above us. We passed under a high stone arch, gloomy and weather-worn, on which was carved the date of the fortress, but where it would have been more fitting to have seen as on the gates of Hell : " *Lasciate ogni speranza—*." I must confess that as we walked up the long vaulted passage—smelling of damp earth and Germans—towards the centre of the fort, I felt almost excited at being at last inside this formidable place.

On reaching the German office I was formally handed over to the authorities by my guards, who then withdrew. An officer with eyes set dangerously close together welcomed me with a crafty smile, and a *Feldwebel*, with whom later on I became unpleasantly well acquainted as the central figure in many a search, went over my pockets and clothing for contraband without success. The usual particulars as to my name, profession and career were taken down in a large ledger, and after a few more formalities I was shown the door which led into the prisoners' section of the camp and set " free."

The place in which I now found myself seemed, for the moment, to be considerably worse than even my gloomiest anticipations had led me to believe. A peculiarly evil-smelling passage, badly lit by a single

oil lamp, led away on either hand. In the unaccustomed darkness I was quite unable at first to make out in which direction I was supposed to go. After a moment's hesitation I perceived a small circle of daylight some distance off to the right and I turned towards it, feeling my way. Presently I came out of this tunnel and saw in front of me a long two-storied building apparently containing the rooms inhabited by the prisoners. To my left, and behind me, the ground rose almost perpendicularly to the level of the flat, earth-covered top of the building, which seemed to be the summit of the fort. To the right a wide path led past the front of the building, disappearing some twenty yards off under an archway. Just then a man came out of a door in the building in front of me, and to my joy I recognized Stewart, my friend and enemy—and therefore doubly my friend—of Weilburg days.

## CHAPTER XII

STEWART at once took charge of me, piloting me round the camp, showing me the different rooms and telling me the names of the other British prisoners. It was most amusing meeting him again and being able to talk over old times at Weillburg. He had been sent straight on to Zorndorf from Freidberg and had been unable to escape so far, but he was evidently very keen to try. He gave me news of Medlicott, who had been transferred to some camp in Hanover, whence he had broken out twice in rapid succession, unfortunately without success, although on one occasion he got to within a mile of the Dutch frontier.

There were only five British officers at Zorndorf when I arrived, and two of these were serving a short period of imprisonment for an attempted escape. There were, in addition, six Belgians, thirty French and one hundred and fifty Russian officers. All the Belgians and half of the French had been sent there for attempted escapes and the remainder of the French for reprisals. The Russians were there partly for escaping and partly for reprisals; a few because they were a general nuisance or drunkards.

Stewart was in a room with Fraser of the Gordon Highlanders, who had also recently succeeded in getting out of a camp. My room, normally containing four,

was at present only occupied by one Darcy Levy. He was at times subject to fits of the most violent depression when he would either fly into a rage about nothing or else sit for hours without saying a word, but generally he was a most amusing man, having done almost everything from second-rate music-hall turns to sailing "before the mast." He had been captured while flying in the Naval Air Service, and came to Zorndorf after a very clever attempt at escape from Münden in Hanover. He and Stewart soon put me wise as to the various methods which had been employed, or were still untried, in attempting to escape from Zorndorf.

The other two in my room, at the moment in jail, were Breen, the man who had escaped from Mainz, and Hardy of the Connaught Rangers. In their recent attempt they had been within an ace of getting away. Their scheme had consisted in cutting through a wooden grating near the *Kommandantur* and then forcing their way into a passage leading to the German section of the fort. This passage went past the kitchen, and they chose the dinner hour for the attempt. Dressed as German orderlies and armed with soup bowls, they marched boldly down the main gallery, arriving at the main gate without being challenged. Here they explained to the sentry that they were new-comers to the camp and that, as there had not been enough rations to go round, they were returning to the outer guard-house. The sentry was duly sympathetic and was just on the point of opening the gate to let them out, when a German N.C.O. approached and, taking pity on the new-comers, insisted on escorting

them back to the kitchen and obtaining the necessary food. On the way back this man became suspicious, and, after putting one or two questions, realized that something was very wrong and gave the alarm. Whereupon, amid scenes of great excitement and with much triumphant shouting, they were arrested and led off to jail.

I had never met Hardy, but I had heard a great deal about him. His reputation as a prison-breaker was, I suppose, the most widely known throughout the camps of Germany. He had been captured just after Mons, where he had gained a D.S.O., and on coming to Germany he was amongst the first to try to escape. Some of his adventures were really quite astounding.

On one occasion he broke out of the camp at Halle, situated in an old factory in the middle of the town. The camp was very heavily guarded, and some of the many prisoners who had been there told me that escape was almost impossible. Hardy made light of the difficulties and by skilfully picking the locks of several disused sheds, climbing over roofs of various houses and bluffing his way past the outside sentries, finally managed to get clear. Dressed in the most wretched of civilian clothing and speaking very little German, he made straight for the railway station and took train for Leipzig. On arriving at that town he had to wait for several hours before finding another train; then, doubling back on his tracks, he made for Berlin. He crossed the capital on foot, bought food and drink at a small restaurant and, finding the station he wanted, caught a train going in the direction

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of Holland. At Bremen he had to change again and finally left the railway at Delmenhorst.

It had been his intention to walk the rest of the way to the Dutch frontier; but when he left Delmenhorst it was midnight, in the depth of winter, with many degrees of frost. Not only had he been travelling by train for twenty-four hours almost continually—most of the time standing up in a fourth-class compartment—but also he had had very little food and his clothing was extremely thin. It is easy then to understand how rapidly he became exhausted. After walking for a mile or two in what he thought must be the right direction, he lost his way, went round in a circle and eventually found himself approaching the station he had recently left. More or less worn out, he decided that the only course open to him was to get into some kind of shelter and wait for the morning. On one of the deserted sidings he found a small shanty quite empty except for a braiser. It was too inviting to be resisted and he went inside and sat down. He must have fallen asleep, for the next thing he remembered was a railway guard standing over him tapping him on the shoulder. His first rather hazy explanations, probably made in bad German, aroused the man's suspicions and, calling one of his mates, he marched Hardy off to the local prison.

Hardy's next attempt was even more astounding, and much more nearly successful. He and a Belgian named Basschewitz escaped from Magdeburg. I am quite unable to remember the method of the actual escape, save that it was in some way particularly

daring. On getting clear of the camp they made for the town and immediately took train to Berlin. Here they changed trains and went on to Stettin, thence to Stralsund, crossing by ferry to the Island of Rügen. They then headed, on foot, for the small port of Sassnitz and, on arriving there, began to make inquiries amongst the seamen working on the dockside for information about ships crossing to Sweden or Denmark. There happened to be several neutral ships in the harbour and the captain of a Swedish steamer, chancing to hear of them, offered for a comparatively small sum of money to engage them as deck hands. The arrangement was made in the morning and the ship was to sail in the afternoon. They went on board at midday and tried to find odd jobs to do, so as to give the appearance of being busy to any inquisitive onlookers.

But there must have been some one in the town who suspected them, because less than half an hour before the steamer was due to sail a party of police marched down to the dock and demanded that the ship's company should be assembled. Hardy and his companion were at once spotted as not being members of the original crew. They were dragged off to prison, and the next day a party of guards arrived to take them back to Magdeburg.

I forget if they were marched back across Rügen or not, but at any rate at some point on the island the N.C.O. in charge of the party decided that they were to pass the night at a small wayside inn. The guards slept in the same room as their prisoners, two on either side of them, and thinking apparently

that this made everything safe they all fell asleep. In the middle of the night Hardy and Basschewitz managed to crawl to the window, open it and climb out without giving the alarm. They made for the coast at their best speed, but a day later, the whole country-side having been alarmed and it being more or less impossible to get off the island, they were both recaptured. This time they were very badly treated, thrown into jail and, to their amazement accused of murder! After many inquiries as to the identity of the person they were supposed to have killed, they were told that it was the N.C.O. in charge of the guard from whom they had escaped. He had, it appeared later, been so terrified of the consequences of his carelessness that he had committed suicide by blowing out his brains. After many weeks in prison, the charge was dropped, owing I believe to the admission made by one of the guards that he had actually seen the N.C.O. in question shoot himself. It was then that Hardy had been sent to Zorndorf.

I very soon realized that the story of the utter impossibility of escape from Zorndorf was not strictly accurate, and as a matter of fact two Russian officers who had recently escaped were still at large. They had succeeded in getting out by means of the old washing-basket trick, a familiar feature in every camp. Strangely enough the working of this scheme at Zorndorf, where one would have expected the Germans to be very wise, was very easy.

The camp washing was sent away once a week in a huge box measuring about five feet square. This

box was packed in the afternoon and stood for a whole night just outside the window of the Russian orderlies' room on the ground floor of the building. The two Russians had cut a panel from the back of the box and crawled in after taking out some of the washing. They then screwed the panel up on the inside, and the next morning they were hoisted upon a cart and driven out of the camp in triumph. It was some time before we had news of their further adventures. One of them was recaptured, after a fortnight of freedom, wandering about in Poland. The other, of whose success we were convinced, was found no less than seven months later, staying with some German relations in Berlin.

I was unfortunately just too late in coming to Zorndorf to take part in the digging of the famous tunnel. This tunnel, certainly the longest ever constructed in Germany, would, if it had been completed, have measured approximately one hundred and fifty metres. Even so, it was over one hundred and ten metres long when discovered by the Germans. Tremendous difficulties had been encountered in the course of the digging, and wonderful ingenuity had been displayed by the prisoners. The entrance was concealed in a corner of one of the French rooms, and for the first few yards a channel had been cut through some soft concrete. After this the shaft had wound about along the various foundation walls, passing right underneath them at points where the earth was softest, or breaking through them where the cement was fairly brittle. The earth was carried away from the tunnel mouth in sacks made by the prisoners.

It was then disposed of under the floors in the various rooms, where there was a space of about a foot between the boards and the concrete foundations.

After clearing the foundations the tunnel sloped downwards for about sixty metres in a straight line towards the ditch, but, on arriving beneath one of the concrete gun positions—known as *Caponnières* in the ditch, the diggers struck water and the tunnel became completely flooded for many yards. Another passage was then commenced at right angles, and after some ten yards was again turned towards the ditch. This time no water was encountered and the shaft was pushed on, to beneath the foundations of the outer wall. The question of how to bring the tunnel as quickly as possible to the surface, forty feet above, was still being discussed when suddenly the Germans made a move. Up to that time they had not seemed to have even the vaguest suspicion, but one morning they raided the French room and without any hesitation pulled up the floor boards and discovered the entrance.

The prisoners were astounded at the abruptness of the disaster since the work had been carried on for many months with the greatest care and secrecy, and nothing had been done which could possibly have alarmed the Germans. Almost every prisoner in the camp had been engaged in some way or other in the making of the tunnel, the very few exceptions being prisoners who were either too ill to escape or inebriate Russians. Every one racked his brains to try and discover how on earth the Germans had got wind of the affair and, after much roundabout ques-

tioning, one of the Germans admitted that it was a Russian who had betrayed the scheme. Apparently a confirmed drunkard, this Russian had one day run short of alcoholic refreshment and being seized with a craving for drink of any kind had gone to the Germans and offered to sell them the secret for a bottle of gin. The bottle was immediately produced, and the Russian, having told his story, was clapped into jail.

Overjoyed with their discovery, the Germans did little more than close down the tunnel and make a thorough search of the camp. Very unwisely they permitted the Russian to whom they owed so much to return to the camp a few weeks later. Feeling was naturally so strong against him that three of his compatriots were told off to watch him day and night lest he should be murdered. I am quite uncertain as to his ultimate fate, but I have a strong suspicion that he did not live very long.

Amongst those who had given themselves wholeheartedly to the tunnel construction was the celebrated French aviator, Garros, who was still in the camp when I arrived. Some of his devices, particularly for the ventilation in the shaft, were really brilliant. I never saw the ventilating apparatus, but I believe it consisted of a long pipe, made entirely out of circular food tins cleverly soldered together, leading from the entrance to the end of the shaft. At the mouth of the tunnel a fan worked by a gramophone motor drew out the bad air, whilst a bellows pumped fresh air down a second pipe.

Garros was an extremely nice fellow who had had a very hard time as a prisoner, having been in Zorndorf

ever since his capture in 1914. Unlike many prisoners, he did not take to escaping from a love of adventure or as a relief to the tedium of captivity, but solely from the point of view that it was his duty to return to France again. At the time of my arrival he and some other French officers were secretly at work on a scheme, the details of which were unknown to us.

In spite of the tunnel failure, the inhabitants of Zorndorf remained optimistic and countless new schemes were soon on foot. I started to collect the elements of a new escaping kit and made inquiries with a view to obtaining a compass and maps. I discovered that Zorndorf possessed one great advantage over the majority of camps in Germany: ordinary German money was allowed to the prisoners. The Germans probably thought that none of them would be able to get very far from the camp even if they succeeded in breaking out, and that there was therefore no need to supply the usual valueless "token" currency. This was a great advantage to us since it did away with the necessity of buying real money at a high rate of exchange from one of the more corrupt Germans.

At the beginning of November, just as I was beginning to get settled in my new abode, Hardy and Breen returned from jail. I at once got in touch with them and asked if I might join up in any future attempt. They agreed and we started to look around for ways and means. Another confederate of theirs was Captain Bacquet, of the French cavalry, and we decided that, in the event of our getting out, we would divide into two parties—Hardy and Breen, and Bacquet and myself.

I do not remember what our first scheme was, but I feel sure that it was something wild and very unlikely to succeed from the fact that I can recollect nothing of the method of escaping, but a great deal about the route we were to follow afterwards. It was always a bad sign when a tremendous amount of talk was expended on such details as the trains to be taken, towns to be passed through, and the exact point at which the frontier was to be crossed, as this generally implied that not very much was being said about the actual plan of escape—possibly because those attempting it had little or no confidence in its success.

In this particular case, Bacquet and I worked out a marvellous and complicated system for eluding pursuit. It consisted principally in travelling by train in every direction possible except the right one, and in taking about a month to reach the frontier. But we never got any further than collecting a lot of kit, and eventually the whole arrangement died a natural death.

Towards the middle of December, Hardy and I realized that we were actually without a single good plan for breaking out. Something had to be done, and we examined and re-examined every possible scheme that had ever been suggested. The various plans for walking out dressed as Germans were more or less out of the question, not only since Hardy and Breen's recent abortive attempt, but also because a month or two previously one of the Russian officers had attempted it. Dressed as a German officer and speaking perfect German, he had managed to bluff his way past all the sentries, in spite of the fact that



he had no pass of any sort. But like so many Russian schemes his plan contained an element of eccentricity, for he carried with him a home-made saddle and bridle intending, as he afterwards told us, to catch a horse and ride back to Russia. A German N.C.O. outside the camp noticing this strange equipment and having observed that the sentry on the gate had not asked the supposed German officer to produce a pass, followed him and eventually brought him back to the camp—saddle, bridle and all. After this, of course, the Germans were much more on the look-out for schemes of this type. As a matter of fact, we seriously considered for a short time the possibility of dressing up one of the French officers, who closely resembled the camp commandant both in face and figure, and strolling out with him in our ordinary uniform as though we were going on one of the weekly afternoon walks which had recently been authorized at Fort Zorndorf. Somehow the idea did not appeal to the Frenchman, and this delightful scheme also fizzled out.

At length Hardy and I came to the conclusion that there were just two plans in which success was at all likely. One of these had been originated by the French and was not likely to mature for several months, and in any case it would only be after the French had succeeded that we would be able to try it. The other scheme was very much more desperate and offered, in the opinion of most people, very little prospect of success.

## CHAPTER XIII

THE commandant, a fat benevolent-looking Prussian of over forty, lived just outside the fort in a cottage lying on the fringe of the woods, which grew close to the camp on the north-eastern side. Being not only corpulent but lazy, he seldom troubled to come inside the fort, so that, if he wished to see any of the prisoners, they were usually brought under guard to his house. The guard never consisted of more than two men with rifles, and lately we had noticed that there was only one man. When the prisoners who were to see the commandant reached his house, the escort knocked at the door and went in to announce his arrival, leaving the prisoners outside. The position was more or less screened by trees, although less than a hundred yards away from the sentries on the fort, and the woods were scarcely fifteen yards off. Barely ten seconds were necessary to dash round the corner of the house and jump over the fence into the woods. A sprint for several yards, and steady running for a few miles, would take one clear from all immediate pursuit. With food, money, maps and a compass, there was just a chance of getting clean away.

After much discussion three of us eventually decided to try it, the party consisting of Hardy, Breen and myself. There were only three main obstacles to be

overcome: we had to make sure that all three of us were taken over to see the commandant at the same time; secondly it was necessary to carry sufficient food for several days, and lastly we had to wear our civilian clothes underneath our uniforms as far as the commandant's house. To avoid appearing unnaturally bulky we could only take the absolute minimum of food and clothing, but this had the advantage of enabling us to travel faster once we were away. We determined to start on January 1st (1917), but we were delayed by bad weather until the 3rd.

At about half-past two in the afternoon of that day, I went into the German office and asked one of the clerks to telephone to the commandant asking him whether he could see us about a cinema, which we wanted to start in the camp. A few moments later the commandant sent a message to say that he wished to interview us at once—little knowing what kind of a movie show we were going to enact near his picturesque cottage.

I hurried back to the room where we lived and told the other two of the news, and we hurriedly put on our civilian clothes, then uniform overcoats, and crammed our pockets with biscuits, chocolate and malted-milk tablets. By this time we all had nervous misgivings and the prospects of success seemed remarkably small. As soon as we were ready we went back to the office and asked for the escort.

One man, unarmed save for his bayonet, took us out. Everything went as well as could be desired, and none of the many Germans we passed seemed to notice how fat we looked. But as we got near to the house we saw that the sentry, whose duty it was to

inspect the outside of the fort once every hour, was just behind us. This made matters extremely awkward as the man was armed and would be able to give chase immediately we started running. There was no question of turning back and we simply had to take the risk, although personally, I must confess, I felt by no means keen about it.

We reached the house and our escort went inside according to plan. There was not a moment to be lost, as he would be out again in less than a minute. We tiptoed away from the door, rounded the corner of the house, and broke into a run.

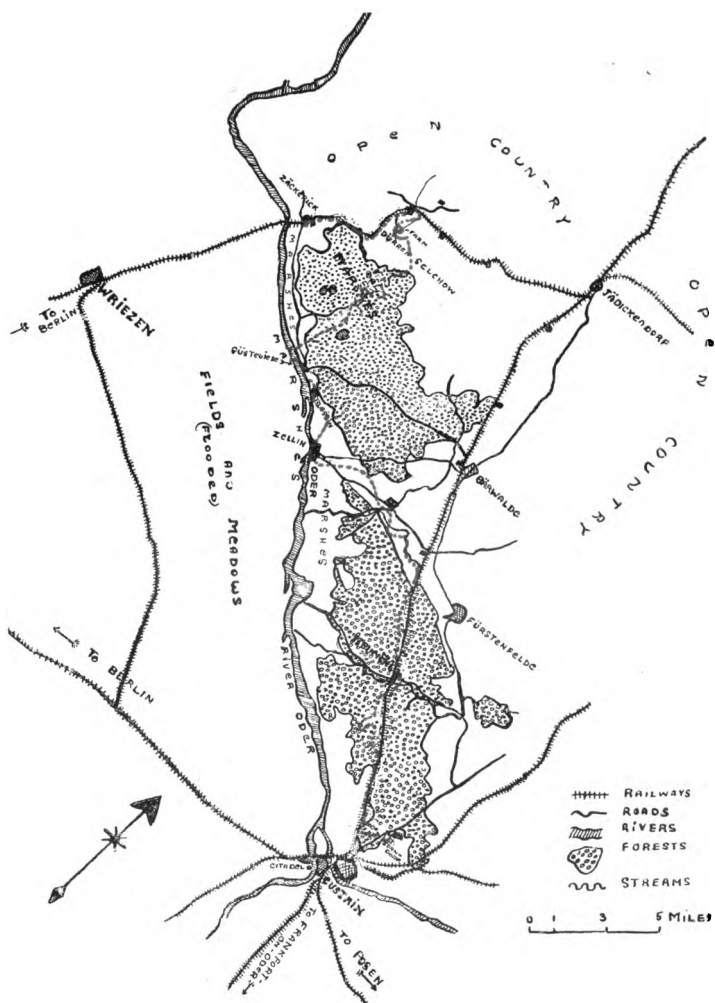
I had the luck to be first. Closely followed by Hardy, I jumped over the fence into the woods and sprinted away as hard as I could. There was scarcely any undergrowth, and running was easy and silent. Two hundred yards from our starting-point lay the main road from Cüstrin to Stettin ; I crossed this, glancing to either side to see if anyone could tell which way we went, scrambled up the bank opposite and plunged into the woods again. I ran on for another hundred yards or so, and then slowed down and looked around. I had not heard a sound except my own footsteps and was surprised to see that Hardy was close behind me. He had thrown away his khaki overcoat and cap, and was now arrayed completely in a villainous black civilian suit with a dirty black cap on his head. Breen was nowhere to be seen. Hardy came up, apparently astonished that I was already slowing down, and shouted to me :

“ Take off your coat and come on. They are after us ! ”

I pulled off my overcoat and the khaki collar and tie I was wearing, re-arranged my civilian clothes and put on an old workman's cap. By this time Hardy had got some way ahead and I started off to try and catch him up. There were still no sounds of pursuit, and a little farther on I looked round once more. Through the trees I caught sight of Breen about three hundred yards back, walking slowly and apparently out of breath. I turned again and ran on, but Hardy had disappeared somewhere in the bushes ahead and I was unable to find him. We were fortunately quite prepared to be separated from the outset, and each of us was independent of the others, having a map, a compass, money and food of his own. I was very sorry to get out of touch with the other two, but in a wild scramble like this each man had to fend for himself.

I jogged on for some time, thoroughly pleased at being temporarily free again. Suddenly from some distance behind I heard faint shouts and the sound of rifle shots; the Germans had evidently overtaken Breen. I wondered if they had already got him and were firing as a signal, or if they were actually shooting at him. The thought that they might get on to my tracks next, made me redouble my efforts to get clear of the danger zone.

The route we had chosen was a fairly simple one. About three miles to the east of Zorndorf lies the railway to Stettin. The line runs nearly due north through large tracks of forest, and we intended to follow the course of this line for about twenty miles, then branch off in a north-westerly direction.



SKETCH MAP OF ESCAPE FROM FORT ZORNDORF, JANUARY 3RD AND 4TH 1917

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Little over half an hour's running through the woods brought me to the railway, and after some difficulty in getting round a few houses and avoiding farm labourers, I found a path running parallel to the line and about twenty yards from it, which I proceeded to follow. The pursuit did not give any further trouble and, getting very blown with continuous running, I slowed down to a walk. The short winter's afternoon was drawing to a close and with darkness came increased safety. I had no very definite plan of action, except that it was necessary to put as much distance as possible between myself and the camp during the night, and next day I would take the train, if possible, straight to Berlin. Once in Berlin, it would be time to think again.

I walked on for several hours, avoiding all houses along the line and keeping a careful watch at the level crossings I came to. Occasionally, when passing an isolated house, the usual dog would start barking furiously and I made wide circuits of these places in case the owners should come out. Once I thought I was caught. A particularly annoying dog had been barking for a good ten minutes at me, when I heard voices and saw lights approaching along a track crossing the railway. They seemed a fairly numerous party, and just when I was turning round to take cover I heard footsteps coming down the track from the opposite direction. I turned and ran back into the woods, and almost instantly, as though I had been heard, a whistle was blown and another dog began to bark close at hand. I went on running for a few seconds and then, pushing my way into the thickest



part of the undergrowth, stopped to listen for any further signs of pursuit. I could still hear a dog barking in the distance, and not very far off I could hear the cracking of twigs and approaching footsteps. Presently I fancied I could hear voices coming from yet another direction. I seemed to be completely surrounded and I believed that a large party of Germans must be closing in on me. I felt thoroughly unnerved. I have never been particularly brave in the dark, and I naturally imagined every bush was a man and every branch a rifle.

After about ten minutes, as the various sounds died down, I began to retrace my steps cautiously and on reaching the track found it deserted. I crossed it at once and went on. I neither heard nor saw anyone else, and I never found out whether there was really a search party out, or whether it was not largely my imagination.

I found the railway again and walked beside it until I came to a stream which I had been expecting to find for some time. According to the map, it should have been very small—barely ten yards across—but actually it was in flood, a hundred yards wide at some points and with a very strong current running. I did not like the idea of swimming it, and, moreover, I wanted to keep my clothes respectable for the train journey next day. On the far side were the first houses of a village and a railway station, making swimming even more inadvisable. The alternative was to cross by the railway bridge, which was in all probability guarded. We had heard in Zorndorf that if anyone escaped all bridges and railway stations, and many of the larger

villages in the neighbourhood, would be watched by sentries within a very short space of time. It seemed likely therefore that this bridge would be guarded as well as others. In the dark, and from the side of the railway embankment, it was impossible to see whether this was so or not, and to approach close enough to find out appeared risky.

Something had to be done, however, so climbing up the embankment to the railway track I crawled to the bridge. It was unguarded. I crossed it and got down from the embankment as quickly as possible on the far side. The lights of the station were barely fifty yards off; there seemed to be nobody about; but I was afraid that I might be seen and, making a wide detour of station and village, I got quickly back into the woods.

It was now about half-past eight, and I had been on the move since about half-past three in the afternoon. At a rough estimate I had covered about fifteen to eighteen miles in a northerly direction. I was beginning to feel rather tired and a small stream in a quiet corner of the forest decided me to call a halt. I sat down, ate some chocolate and drank some water. Ten minutes later, feeling quite fresh again, I got up to go on. I was just lighting a cigarette when I heard footsteps coming towards me. This time it was useless to run and if I stood still the man might have no suspicions. I waited. He passed by without looking in my direction, and I watched him go with considerable relief. Then, in spite of the darkness, something about him struck me as familiar. A moment's hesitation, and I called out in German. He answered and

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I realized that I was not mistaken ; it was Hardy !

We had been separated for over five hours in the forest, so it was a remarkable piece of luck which brought us together again, and for several minutes we must have been in real danger of being recaptured while the forest echoed with our laughter—it was such a relief to have a companion again.

Hardy told me what had happened to him since he left Zorndorf. He had lost his compass and had had much difficulty in finding his way. We discussed the best route to follow, what point we should make for, and then went on again. For some time we followed the path alongside the railway line where it ran through the woods. It was easy going and we kept up a good pace, but after about four or five miles the railway came out into the open country and we could see in front of us the lights of a station.

We had decided to leave the line at this point and strike off roughly north-west across country. The first half-hour or so was terribly hard work over ploughed fields, made particularly soft and muddy by recently melted snow. After this we reached a fairly good track, skirting the edge of the woods. We followed it for some distance and it eventually brought us to a small village—Klossow, our map called it. It was fairly late, the chances of our meeting anyone were slight, and we made up our minds to walk straight through it. The lamps in practically all the houses were out as we went down the road and we only passed one cottage with a light. Through the window, we caught sight of a man comfortably reading in front of a large fire of logs.

At about this time it began to rain. The sky had been overcast the whole day, and occasionally a few flakes of snow had fallen. It had cleared up slightly at the time we started and we had been in hopes of a fine night ; but now it commenced to pour, and in a short time we were wet through. It was very dark and in spite of map and compass we had great trouble in finding our way. Occasionally we followed cart tracks, and when we lost them we would walk across country till we found a path or a road going in the right direction. It was heavy going all the time and just about as cold as it could be, though not actually freezing. The wind seemed to take all the life out of one.

At last we found a passable road which we followed for several miles, still in a north-westerly direction, to a large village not far from the bank of the River Oder. We walked through the village—it turned out to be Zellin—without any trouble, but it was a maze of winding streets and lanes and we had a lot of bother finding our way out of it. We tried the doors of some barns on the outskirts to see if we could get shelter from the rain for at least a few hours, but it was useless ; they were all either locked or else dangerously close to houses.

After leaving the village behind we pushed on as hard as we could to the north, with the rain beating in our faces. We passed through another village without stopping and, at about one o'clock, came to yet another, standing on the banks of the Oder. This time we went down to the water's edge and found a boat. We managed to undo the chain securing it

and then saw that there were no paddles or oars. We hunted round for some time, found a couple of poles and pushed off. Unfortunately the river was in flood and what we had imagined to be the banks were in reality flooded fields with the hedges just above water. It meant that we would have to steer through innumerable small gaps in order to get to the main stream. At this point—near Güstebiese—we estimated the river to be over a mile, and it was pitch dark. Walking fast over rough ground had kept a certain amount of warmth in us, but sitting in an open boat with a cutting wind and heavy rain beating through our scanty clothing was wearing us out much more quickly. To make matters worse, the small sack containing our slender stock of food and cigarettes fell into the bottom of the boat which was full of water; finally both our punt-poles broke off short. This ended our river trip. We must have looked remarkably comic, but we were without doubt the two coldest and most miserable men in Germany. We made for the shore again as quickly as we could, with only our hands to propel the horrible craft, and “abandoned ship.”

We started walking again at once and soon reached the comparative shelter of the woods. It was positively warm after our boating experience and we went along at a good pace. But it was not long before we began again to feel the effects of our hard cross-country tramp, for Zorndorf had not made either of us too fit, and once or twice I went to sleep while we were walking, to dream of hot drinks or a warm bed.

The woods through which we were now going were

much more dense and also marshy, and we could only follow paths that often took us miles out of our way. Several times we walked into impassable swamps and had to retrace our steps, and more than once we seemed completely lost. The map was not of much assistance and a northerly compass course was our only guide. Somewhere between two and five o'clock in the morning we each went through a period of utter exhaustion, fortunately not both at the same time as otherwise we should have been entirely off the track. As it was, our course was rather erratic and we wasted a lot of time. But we made considerable headway through this wilderness in spite of our exhaustion. We were so tired and sleepy that at times we thought we could see lights in the distance or houses in the forest, and once we felt certain we were alongside a railway line which we knew was many miles away.

I cannot remember exactly when and how things happened, but at length, just before six o'clock in the morning, we got clear of the forest and marshes and suddenly found ourselves near a large farm. Several houses were lit up and work was just starting in the farm buildings. We managed to slip right through the centre of the farmyard without raising the alarm, although there were one or two people about and the place was bright with lights. Fortunately, the customary dogs were silent—tired out, we supposed, after a night of barking. We could find no tracks and were forced to take to ploughed fields again, heavier than ever after the night's rain. Then suddenly we heard a most welcome sound: the noise of an engine shunting, not far off. We were about to strike the

branch line towards which we had been heading all night.

This line runs roughly from north-east to south-west, crossing the River Oder not far from where we now found ourselves, and then going south-west to Berlin. We intended to make for a station on the line and travel straight to Berlin. But it was not so easy to find the station. We walked a long way through the ploughed fields and at last found a road leading to the village of Selchow where people were just beginning to stir. We could see no signs of the railway, and we realized that the station must lie some way out. We tried one of the roads starting from the centre of the village, but it seemed to go in the wrong direction and we halted to discuss our next move.

It was just beginning to get light and everywhere men were starting out to work. It was bitterly cold and the wind was as keen and strong as ever. We were feeling stiff and footsore from our long march, and we decided to go into a shop or a public-house to ask the way and if possible get something warm to drink. The local blacksmith's shop was horribly tempting. There was a bright fire burning in the forge and the man was already at work shoeing a horse. We hesitated. The place looked warm, and blacksmiths are honest folk—too honest for us perhaps. It seemed unwise to go in, and we passed on.

In the main street of the village we saw a lighted window ; coming closer we found it to be a small shop. We hastily repeated the main points of the story we were to tell if any question were asked, and walked in.

The shop was empty and seemed to be the sort of place we wanted. A girl came out of the back room and we asked her for something hot to drink. In a short time she produced some excellent hot coffee and biscuits. We swallowed the coffee at a gulp and asked for more. While waiting we sat down and rested, overjoyed at the short spell of comparative comfort. Presently an unpleasant-looking individual, sallow-faced and with a "Kaiser" moustache, came from the back of the store. I think he mistrusted us from the first, for he at once began to ask questions. We certainly looked rather suspicious objects. Our clothes were saturated with rain and plastered with mud. Hardy's coat was badly torn by barbed wire, our faces were dirty and unshaven. Luckily we could both speak German.

"Have you come a long way?" said the man eyeing our clothing.

"A fair distance."

"You seem to have been out all night; you are very wet."

"Yes, we had to start last night to catch the train here this morning."

"Are you travelling a long way?"

"As far as Berlin. This is my cousin," I said, pointing to Hardy, "who is going with me. You see my mother has just died and we are going to the funeral."

This silenced him for a time. The story of the "dead mother" is always useful, and, if told with proper pathos, generally most effective.

Presently our friend got inquisitive again and asked



where we had come from. I hurriedly thought of the name of some village which we had passed in the night :

“ Güstebiese.”

“ Who is your employer there ? ”

“ Herr Ebenstein,” I answered.

He could not say much to that, as he obviously did not know the village, and could not possibly know Herr Ebenstein because he did not exist. This about ended our cross-examination, and we went on with our coffee, while the man retired to the back of the shop to think things over. We borrowed a needle and thread and mended Hardy's coat ; then, having paid our bill, we set out again.

The station we discovered lay about a mile and a half from the village. It was now broad daylight, and labourers, including parties of Russian prisoners, were at work in the fields. The country around was bleak and bare, for we had left all the woods and forests behind when we passed through the farm before dawn. There was nowhere to hide if we were pursued, but we had little fear of that, as we were well off the route the Germans would expect us to take.

We reached the station at last ; it consisted of only one building, but outside the yard there was a sort of restaurant. The place was completely deserted and there were no signs of a train coming, although we had hoped and expected to catch one almost at once. We did not like the look of it in the least—it was so deserted. It seemed strange for two bedraggled tramps to go up and ask when the next train left for Berlin, but we pulled ourselves together and walked

in. After searching around a bit we found the waiting-room, and, inside, a couple of railway officials who were busy cleaning and sweeping. We asked them for the next train and were told that it did not leave until half-past eleven. We were at a loss what to do. It was only seven, so that we had over four hours to wait. There was no cover in the surrounding country, and it was out of the question to sit in the empty waiting-room with inquisitive officials about. The restaurant close to the station appeared to be shut and it would have been risky to try and get in. Meanwhile, we were still in the station, stiff with cold in our damp clothes. We had to discuss the situation and decide on our best course. As we could not very well argue on the platform, we made for a little wooden shed, some way from the main building. This happened to be the station lavatory and, as far as such places go, it was the most unsanitary I have ever seen. But it was at least a shelter from the freezing wind, and we were out of sight.

There seemed to be no alternative except to walk back to the village, and if possible get some more coffee, as we realized it might be many hours before we could get any other food. We left the station, followed the road back and returned to the store. There were several other customers in there this time, and our suspicious friend was still behind the counter. A large, unpleasant-looking farmer, with a little pointed beard and small vicious eyes, looked hard at us as we came in. After saying the customary "Good morning," he at once asked me :

"Why aren't you in the army?"

In tones of injured innocence I answered that I was unfit—in fact, that I had been ill for years. The man put the same question to Hardy who said something about the terrible condition of his heart, or his lungs, I forget which. After this, the man contented himself with having a good stare at us. We certainly looked pretty sick that morning, and apparently satisfied him, for he soon left the shop. The rest of the customers also left and we were alone with the owner. We had some more coffee, successfully negotiated a few more questions, and then sitting down we settled ourselves to wait for a couple of hours.

Tired as we were, it was only natural that we should fall asleep, but the owner of the place would not have this at any price, and abruptly woke us up again. He said it was against the rules of the establishment to allow people to sleep there, and if we wanted to do so we must go outside. After this either he or the girl who had been in the shop when we first came in was constantly behind the counter, and whenever we started dozing we were immediately shouted at. Nevertheless we were fairly comfortable and stayed in the place for about two hours, after which we walked slowly back to the station, feeling much better.

Even then we had a good half an hour to wait for the train, but the waiting-room was no longer empty. About a dozen other people had also arrived early, and nobody took much notice of us. We sat down near the booking-office, which was not yet open, and discussed our plans when no one was listening. Once Hardy dozed for a few moments, woke up with a great start and began talking in English! Fortunately there

was a good deal of conversation going on and it passed unnoticed.

Presently the booking-office was opened, and when our turn came we each bought a fourth-class ticket to Berlin, and made our way to the platform. When the train came in we found it was extraordinarily crowded, owing, I suppose, to the reduced war-time service. All the carriages were full and there was only standing room in the fourth-class. This was rather in our favour, as it prevented us from being too conspicuous.

The journey started well, and after the conductor had paid us a visit, clipped our tickets and inspected our passes, we felt that our chances were increasing. We passed a station, and the next one, as we knew, was at the bridge across the Oder. Once beyond the river, we felt we should be out of the zone watched by the Zorndorf authorities.

But our luck had deserted us. At this very next station, Zäckerick, the train stopped an unusually long time, and, just as every one was beginning to wonder why, the door of our compartment was thrown open and a man came in who instantly recognized Hardy, drew a revolver and shouted "Hands up" at the top of his voice. Then seeing me next to Hardy, he repeated his yell with various epithets of abuse. Several women in the carriage shrieked, the men got up and waved their arms at us, and some officials outside joined in the chorus. It was awe-inspiring, but I think we would have been more impressed if we had not noticed that the aged revolver levelled at us was unloaded and did not even possess a breach.

We were bundled out upon the platform and marched in triumph to the station-master's office, where they proceeded to search us, without very much result, as we tore up our maps, swallowing most of the larger pieces, and Hardy managed to put our passes into a stove. The man who had arrested us turned out to be a N.C.O. from Zorndorf; I had never seen him before, but Hardy knew him well and had been caught by him before when filing through some bars in one of the passages leading out of the fort. Both he and a sergeant-major amused themselves at our expense by being noisily rude, but they did not actually knock us about.

The search over, we were taken to a small guard-room at the end of the station, and four men and a corporal were set to watch us. We sat on a bench opposite these men, each of them with a loaded rifle and his finger on the trigger, for something like two hours till the train which was to take us back arrived.

The return journey took five hours, and we slept practically all the way; but we woke up just enough at the stations to notice that at each place a man from Zorndorf joined the train, showing that the elaborate precautions we had heard of had actually been taken. By the time we got to Cüstrin, the Germans with us numbered over a dozen. Five of them marched us to the military prison in the old Citadel, and we were locked up for the night. Breen was already there, although naturally we were not allowed to see him.

Next morning, January 5th, the general commanding the Cüstrin area—a dear old very white-haired man with a Polish name, who was always very kind—

came to see us. He said he disapproved of our method of escape as it involved the commandant, whom he had been compelled to punish. I am afraid we were rather pleased at this, the more so when it was rumoured later that he had been given seven days' arrest. The general sentenced us to a week's solitary confinement, about the most lenient punishment any of us ever received in Germany, and far less than we had expected.

The week passed uneventfully and we returned to Zorndorf on the evening of the 12th, where we met Breen, who had been released the day before. He had a lot to tell about his capture and his return to the camp immediately afterwards; he had been quite badly knocked about with rifle butts by several of the guards. Considering that he was caught so soon after starting, when his pursuers' blood was probably near boiling-point, we thought he was lucky not to have been seriously injured. He had been able to destroy his map and papers before being caught, but we learned from one of the more friendly guards that the Germans had found the remains of the map, and piecing it together had discovered the route we were likely to follow, as this and the railway to Berlin were the only things shown. They had just time to send to Zäckerick during the night the man who was able to catch us next morning. It was unfortunate, but of course Breen was not to blame. We had made a fatal mistake in taking the train at all on that day. If we had waited till nightfall we might have stolen a ride on a goods train, or if we had remained in cover for another twenty-four hours it would probably have been safe by then to take the

train openly. We thought we had marched farther than the Germans could possibly expect—allowing for detours, we had walked a good forty miles in fifteen hours. But, for the decision to board a train, I must accept all responsibility; Hardy by himself would never have done anything so foolish.

## CHAPTER XIV

**F**OR about a week after coming back from jail, Hardy and I gave up all thoughts of escaping and enjoyed what we considered to be a well-earned rest.

Heavy snow had been falling for some time and the whole camp was covered to a depth of several inches, providing the chance of a limited amount of winter sports. We built a toboggan run on quite a good course from the top of our building, down a steep path ending up just outside one of the rooms. The path was very narrow, and towards the bottom passed through a wooden gateway only about two and a half-feet wide. After a few days of frost the whole track, almost one hundred yards long, was covered with ice, and we used to get up a really considerable speed. The negotiation of the small gateway was thrilling and fraught with danger—particularly as the gateposts were covered with barbed-wire. Several men ran into the posts, but the casualties only amounted to a few cuts and a black eye. The Russian orderlies made us two very good toboggans out of old packing-cases and, during the week or so of hard frost, it became an all-day habit among the British. Towards the end of January, a thaw set in and nearly all the snow melted, putting an end to our childish amusements and making us turn our thoughts to escaping once again.



Our first step was to unearth fresh suits of civilian clothing, and in Zorndorf it was difficult to obtain a good kit, largely owing to the fact that there were so few prisoners and so many who wanted to escape. But, one article, a pair of black trousers, was always obtainable. As at Weilburg the Russians, many of whom had been captured in rags and were unable to procure fresh clothing from home, received permission from the Germans to have trousers made out of dark civilian cloth, provided that a red stripe was inserted in the seam. A hint to the Russian tailor, coupled with a few German marks, was sufficient to ensure that the red stripe was only lightly sewn on and therefore easily detached. In the same way many of the Russians had been able to purchase from the German authorities cheap civilian coats, rather resembling Norfolk jackets in shape, from which the regulation badges and buttons were soon removed if they were needed for escaping. As far as overcoats were concerned, either the Belgians or the French could generally be relied upon in an emergency to part with one of their old-style, dark blue service overcoats, which only needed slight alteration. The new-style Russian overcoat, dark reddish-brown in colour, was also a possibility and, if the worst came to the worst, a rather rough-looking coat could be manufactured out of a German blanket.

The hat question was, as ever, much more difficult. A cap could sometimes be made by a tailor out of a blanket, the peak reinforced with cardboard ; but the Germans, like other Europeans, generally wear soft felt hats, for which there is no good substitute. Unless you are an experienced hat-maker it is practically

impossible to make one. In one or two cases hats were smuggled out in parcels, although in Fort Zorn-dorf this was rare as the parcel supervision was very strictly carried out. Occasionally, perhaps, a prisoner might be able to snatch—as did Medlicott—such a hat off the head of a German civilian workman, who had been unwise enough to bring his headgear with him into the camp. But in Zorn-dorf practically the only way to procure this most necessary part of our kit was by bribery.

The Russians discovered that several of the sentries in the camp were Poles sympathetic to the cause of the Allies. On getting into conversation with one or two of them it was soon found that a few hundred marks would buy not only felt hats, but also compasses and maps. The Russians, who received very few parcels from home, were then only too willing to exchange them with us for a few tins of food.

The collecting of our new kit took time, but by the beginning of February Hardy and I had succeeded in scraping together all the necessaries for a long journey. Since our return from jail, I had no very clear idea of what our next scheme would be. In response to my almost ceaseless inquiries Hardy had told me that I must be patient and presently something really good would be forthcoming. I tried to find out from him what plans he had in mind, but he had been sworn to secrecy and I could obtain none save the most meagre details. I was only able to gather that we were to get on to the top of the fort at night, crawl down into the ditch, and there await a favourable moment for crossing the ditch and scaling the outer wall. The plan

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had been worked out in all its details by some French officers, who were about to put it into execution. Just then the strangest rumours began to float around the camp. A man, it appeared, had been arrested in Cüstrin and had admitted that he was employed by a French firm as an agent in an attempt to rescue Garros. We soon had confirmation of these rumours from the Germans, who in a great state of excitement seized upon Garros and his friends, and bundled them all off to a camp in Silesia. These precautions were of little use, for only a few months later Garros succeeded in escaping, crossing the Dutch frontier and returning to fight in France.

In the fort the discovery of this plot caused several severe searches of the camp and an even stricter supervision of the parcels. Henceforth every tin of food was opened by the Germans in front of each prisoner, and every bit of the contents was cut up into the smallest pieces.

Quite another effect was caused by the removal of the French : they left their excellent and well-thought-out scheme in the hands of a Belgian cavalry officer named Bastin, who, being great friends with Hardy, asked us both to join him.

Bastin, I must relate *en passant*, had already escaped from two camps, and on one occasion had experienced the most remarkable adventures. He had broken out of Magdeburg, from which place he took the train to Bremen. He had some previous knowledge of this port and felt certain that he could manage to stow away on a tramp steamer sailing for a neutral country. On arriving at Bremen he made inquiries and found

that there was no steamer leaving for a week, whereupon he put up at a small hotel. Now Bastin had no proper passports, no luggage and could not at that time speak very good German, yet for one whole week he stayed at that hotel and succeeded in convincing the authorities of his respectability. He had quite a lot of money with him and on the day of his arrival he bought himself a trunk and several suit-cases to represent his "luggage" and had it sent first to the station and then to his hotel, as though it had just come on by a later train. He used to spend most of his days sitting in small out-of-the-way cafés, drinking beer, and writing himself letters which he would then post and receive at the hotel.

At the beginning of his week's stay, he got into touch with a Swede—or a Dane, I forget which—the captain of a small steamer. This man was willing for a certain sum to take Bastin on board as a passenger. But, as the week went on and the time for sailing drew near, the captain's price went up, until finally, either alarmed or suspicious of Bastin, he refused point-blank to have anything more to do with the arrangement. Bastin had a final and stormy interview with him on board the ship in Bremen harbour, ending in the captain putting him under arrest and sending for the police. By jumping over the ship's side into a small boat and rowing for dear life to the quay, Bastin managed to get away; but Bremen had become too hot for him and he was forced to leave the same night. He then took train to as near the Dutch frontier as he dared, and got out to do the last few miles on foot. He had nearly crossed the frontier, when an

inaccurate strip of map led him astray and he was recaptured.

Bastin was of course thoroughly acquainted with all the details of the scheme, which he explained to us carefully, asking for our help or criticism.

The main idea, as I had thought, was to get out on to the top of the fort at night and crawl to the ditch. This idea was naturally the starting-point of many of the schemes of escape from Zorndorf, but the great problem was how to do it. According to the French plans, it was almost easy. At the back of our semi-subterranean building ran a long corridor with, on the one side, doors giving access into our rooms, and on the other a blank wall. In the centre of the fort this blank wall was pierced by a small iron gateway, from which a corridor ran back fifty yards to a brick dug-out, or *caponnière*, divided into two rooms. One of these was used by some of the prisoners during the daytime as a kitchen, and the other was rigged up as a Roman Catholic Chapel. Although both the passage and the compartment were underground, each room had a small barred window looking out into the deep trench, which ran round the fort near its summit. In the chapel room there was also a wooden door leading into the trench. This door was made of stout planks, and was nailed shut and reinforced on the outside with heavy beams of timber. Sentries on the top of the fort could see down into the trench both by day and by night, and they had this door and the two windows under observation, apparently making any attempt at forcing them out of the question. In spite of this,

after weary weeks of work, the French had managed to cut away a small section of the door right at its foot where the planks happened to be thinnest. This had been done so carefully that it was impossible to see the cut, even at close quarters.

How to get into the chapel at night was another of the questions to be solved. The iron grille at the bottom of the passage leading to the chapel was closed every night by the Germans, after they had made sure that no prisoners were left in the chapel or in the other room. The French priest who officiated was allowed, however, to keep his vestments and other religious equipment in two small cupboards standing in the chapel; and of these two cupboards he kept the key. By hiding in one of these while the Germans went their evening round, it would be possible, so the French said, for one to stay in the chapel in perfect safety all night. The small panel having been cut from the bottom of the door, it would be equally possible to get into the trench and crawl down the side of the fort into the ditch. Permission to make use of the cupboards was given by the priest and having got thus far with the scheme, a French officer, for whose courage I have the most intense admiration, carried out a reconnaissance. He hid in one of the cupboards, and in the middle of the night crawled out of the chapel door into the trench. Worming his way round through the various trenches and fortifications, he was able to see exactly where all the sentries were placed.

Every prisoner in Zorndorf knew that during the night a dozen sentries patrolled the ditch, which was lighted at intervals of about forty yards by petrol

lamps. In addition there were on the top of the fort some six or seven sentries, but what no prisoner had known hitherto was that at reveille—about 6.30 a.m.—the sentries in the ditch and the sentries on the top of the fort all went to the guard-room. The ditch sentries then came up to the top of the fort to complete their period of duty, and during the day there were no sentries in the ditch. As all the sentries came off their beats and went to the guard-room together, there was an interval of about ten minutes during which no sentries whatever were watching the ditch or the outer wall. During these ten minutes it would be possible for prisoners in hiding near the ditch to climb out with the help of a ladder or some other contrivance.

The next step was the construction of a ladder. When Hardy and I were brought into the scheme, the ladder had been completed with the exception of a few small details which we helped to provide, and the credit for its design lies entirely with the French. The height of the wall surrounding the fort had been estimated at thirty feet, and, as a ladder of this length was obviously too bulky to be carried in safety around the fort in the middle of the night, it was divided into two portions. It was built up in the most ingenious manner with pieces of wood taken from the frames of ordinary deck chairs, and reinforced on the sides and at the joints with small strips of iron. These iron strips were taken from our beds and were destined to be the cause of much trouble with the Germans.

It was thought at first that we should wait until the snow had been completely melted before making the attempt, but towards the middle of February snow

fell again in great quantities and Bastin suggested that we might profit by it by making the attempt disguised in white clothing. This seemed to be an excellent idea which might well succeed in baffling the Germans, and, as events turned out, it probably saved Hardy's life.

At length everything was ready, the ladder completed and our kits prepared. We had only to wait for Bastin's word to go. We were quite secure against any searches by the Germans, since the ladder was hidden under the floor of Bastin's room and our civilian clothes and other kit were likewise stowed away in thoroughly reliable hiding-places.

We all three felt absolutely certain of success. During what we believed to be the last few nights we were ever to spend in Zorndorf, we were in the highest of spirits. I shall never forget some of the extraordinary concerts we used to hold in our room at about this time. We had made great friends with some of the French and with one or two of the Russians, and we used to have the most amusing dinner-parties, generally followed by a game of roulette in one of the Russian rooms, and ending up with a medley of songs.

For some absurd reason we conceived the idea that we could intensely annoy the German sentries posted outside our windows by singing German patriotic songs. Therefore after listening to some really wonderful Russian song, sung in perfect harmony by three or four Russian officers, we would break into the strains of "Die Wacht am Rhein." This noble Teutonic marching-song was rendered amazingly hideous by the banging of tin cans and the discordant shouting of



the British. The party usually broke up accompanied by loud cheering and a jazzed-up version of "Die Lorelei." Peering through the windows we watched the effect it was having on the German sentries, clustered outside in the cold, muttering to one another and wondering what was going to happen next. They must have imagined that we were all quite mad, but at any rate our behaviour probably persuaded them that we were incapable of any serious attempt to escape.

## CHAPTER XV

ON February 15th, the snow being about four inches deep, we decided to make the attempt. Late in the afternoon we transferred our kit from the various hiding-places to the cupboards in the *caponnière*. Bastin meanwhile brought out the sections of the ladder and deposited them under the altar. The last *Appell* was at about half-past five or six o'clock, and immediately after this we all three went up to the chapel. We unlocked the cupboards at once and got inside. Bastin being the bulkiest of the three had a cupboard to himself, whereas Hardy and I with the greatest difficulty managed to squeeze into the other one. As soon as we were inside, Bastin locked our door and then proceeded to fasten himself into his own receptacle by means of a special iron clamp which he had made.

In a state of semi-suffocation we waited in those coffin-like cupboards for about twenty minutes and then, almost on the point of bursting out to get air, we heard the steps of the German guard coming up the passage. He paused at the door of the room opposite and then walked into the chapel. After stamping around for a few seconds, he was evidently satisfied and went out, walking briskly down the passage. A moment or two later we heard the iron grille clang to and the rattle of a key in the lock.

The first stage of the game was successfully accomplished and we were now free to do as we liked for the rest of the night. As quickly as he could, Bastin climbed out of his cupboard and released us from our terribly cramped position. It was still quite light and we crept cautiously past the chapel window into which a sentry might be looking. It was not yet seven o'clock and we did not intend to get out into the trench until three o'clock in the morning. We had a long and weary wait ahead of us, but Bastin had provided a kettle and a small spirit lamp to make coffee, Hardy had brought some sandwiches, and I some blankets so the time passed fairly quickly. One of us was continually on guard by the window watching the nearest sentry pass and repass only a few yards away, on his beat at the top of the fort.

At half-past two we began to get ready. Bastin attended to the screwing up of the various parts of the ladder, while Hardy and I packed all the heavy kit into two large bags made out of white sheets. When these preparations were finished, we took off our uniforms and donned our civilian clothing with the exception of our hats and overcoats, already packed into the bags. Over our civilian clothes we put on the white camouflage dress. It consisted of a white shirt, white trousers, white socks pulled on over our boots, and a close-fitting cap of the type known as a "Balaclava helmet," which covered everything except our eyes. By three o'clock we were ready to sally forth.

But now an unforeseen obstacle suddenly presented itself. A new sentry had come on duty and, unlike

the previous one who had gone at least a hundred yards along his beat in each direction, this man elected to stand almost immediately opposite the chapel window, continually looking in our direction and only moving a few yards every now and then to stamp his feet. It was obviously quite impossible to do anything whilst the man was in that position, and we were forced to wait. At least a dozen times he started to move off in one direction or another and each time, just as Bastin was about to open the panel in the door, the brute would return again to stamp his feet directly in front of us. A couple of hours passed and we began to be seriously worried as to whether he had not seen something of our movements through the chapel window. Shortly after five o'clock we realized that, although the sentry would now be relieved, it was no use trying any more that night. It would soon begin to get light and there would then be no chance of concealment. Very reluctantly we took off our clothing, unfastened the ladder and hid the sections again under the altar. At eight o'clock we knew that the iron grille would be opened again, but we were not sure whether the German guard would take the trouble to come up the passage or not, and we hid ourselves once more in the cupboards. Shortly after eight o'clock, we heard the distant footsteps of the guard and sounds of the iron grille being thrown open. Nothing further happened and a few minutes later we collected our kit and went back to our rooms, announcing ourselves, somewhat crestfallen, for breakfast.

During the following two or three days the Germans

made no sign of having discovered anything and, on going over the details of our night's adventure, we felt certain that we had given the Germans no grounds for suspicion. The sentry's position in front of the window of the chapel had evidently been purely accidental. We waited three days, improving slightly on our kit and watching the sentries for any signs of activity in the neighbourhood of the chapel. The only thing that in any way disturbed us was the presence of two Alsatian police dogs. They were led around the camp at night, and fortunately appeared to be only half-trained.

A great deal of snow fell during these days and the camp was now covered everywhere with at least five inches, making us feel more than ever sure that the snow clothing would be invaluable. During the evening of February 18th, we again transferred our kit to the chapel and by seven o'clock we had locked ourselves in our respective cupboards. Once again we heard the German guard come up the passage to the chapel, and once again he noticed nothing and we heard him lock the iron grille on his way out. We felt much more confident than we had been on the previous occasion and after some sandwiches and a cup of tea we settled down to sleep—in pairs, the third man being on watch—from about ten o'clock until nearly two in the morning. Bastin reassembled his ladder, while Hardy and I packed away the kit and distributed white clothing. At half-past two we started a more intensive watch on the sentry patrolling the ramparts. Unlike the troublesome sentry of a few days before, the man on duty did

his job properly, marching along his beat from end to end and only repassing the window about once in every five minutes.

At last the time came for us to go and Bastin cautiously opened the small panel at the bottom of the door. We had previously settled on the exact load to be carried by each man, the route to be followed and in what order we were to proceed. Under this arrangement Hardy was the first out. With great difficulty he was squeezed through the minute opening, helped by Bastin, whilst I stood just alongside at the window, ready to give the alarm if the sentry reappeared. As soon as Hardy was in the trench, the first and longest section of the ladder, which he was to carry, was slowly and quietly pushed out to him. Watching from the window, I could see him barely three feet away from me. The snow clothing was excellent and so was the white wood of which the greater part of the ladder was made. But certain parts of his face, his hands and the metal parts of the ladder seemed to show up with painful clearness.

While getting through the hole in the door, Hardy lay flat on his chest and, as we pushed the ladder out to him, he naturally kept this position, which was the least conspicuous. Now, having got the ladder, he was just rising to his feet—one hand still on the ground, grasping the ladder with the other—when, like the villain in a melodrama, the black figure of the sentry suddenly became outlined against the grey sky. His appearance at that moment was terribly awkward and I positively gasped from the shock, but I managed to whistle softly to Bastin, who hissed

out a warning to Hardy through the trap-door. On the top of the parapet, not twelve feet away, the sentry stopped and peered down into the ditch. Then taking a step forward he began to unsling his rifle. The suspense of the next few seconds was almost unbearable, and a catastrophe of some sort seemed absolutely imminent. I felt sure, seeing Hardy as clearly as I could, that the sentry could see him too and was about to take aim and shoot. But, having unslung his rifle, the sentry held it for a few seconds in his hands—and then slowly slung it over the other shoulder. He was not going to shoot, but how much had he seen? He stood quite still for at least half a minute, and I was positive that Hardy would be unable to remain immovable for much longer. Hardy, who had been about to rise when the sentry appeared, still had one hand on the ground. Hence he was supporting himself, and the weight of a fifteen feet ladder, on one hand and one knee. At the moment of warning, he had screwed his head round so as to watch the sentry: it was about the most uncomfortable position in which I can imagine an unarmed man to be.

But Hardy was admirable. For the better part of two minutes he remained in that strained posture gazing at the sentry, while I could see that wretched German looking straight down into the trench. Neither Bastin nor I could move or do anything lest we should be heard. And then suddenly the tension was relaxed; the sentry turned his back and walked away. The relief was extraordinary, and now that the immediate danger was over the whole scheme seemed to be easy of execution.

Hardy waited a second or two, turned round to get an "all clear" signal from us, and walked off along the trench carrying the ladder. We gave him three minutes, and then I began to worm my way through the trap-door. Somewhat bulkier than Hardy, I had a struggle to get through, but fortunately no sentry appeared while I was jammed half-way and eventually I scrambled into the trench. The other section of the ladder and a small bag of kit was passed out to me, and I helped Bastin push out the large bag containing the greater part of our civilian clothes and equipment. Before leaving I also made sure that Bastin himself was able to get through that incredibly small opening. Then, the sentry being out of sight, I tip-toed off.

In front of me I knew Hardy was safe, since no sound of any alarm had reached us, and, behind, Bastin was closing up the trap-door, leaving no trace of our departure. Fifty yards down the trench there was a sharp turn to the right and then a further fifty yards to go before coming out of the trench on to a flat triangular piece of ground sloping down towards the ditch. I negotiated the two lengths of trench successfully and then with much fear and trepidation I crept out into the open. From now on, the ground was a great deal more difficult to cross. For nearly a hundred yards there was a gradual slope from the top of the fort, and in full view of any sentry who might happen to be there. Part of it was just in sight of the sentries in the ditch whose voices I could plainly hear, and the slope itself was faintly illuminated by the lamps whose rays,



reflected by the big wall against which they were placed, threw a glow over the greater part of the fortress. For one hair-raising moment I fancied I could see in the dim light, the shadowy form of a police dog, but after a few seconds it—whatever it was—disappeared.

Dragging my ladder through the snow and keeping as flat as possible, I slowly covered the distance and reached a point where the ground sloped sharply away, at an angle of forty-five degrees, into the ditch. At the foot of this steep slope there was a low, loop-holed wall, designed to act partly as a buttress to the mound above and partly as a means of defending the ditch. It was behind this wall that we were to hide until daylight.

I had almost crossed the flat open ground when, pausing to search once more for the sentry before making the descent to the wall, I suddenly heard some one running. For a moment I felt sure that we had been discovered and were being pursued by the Germans. As the footsteps came nearer, I began to realize that the figure gradually taking shape in the semi-darkness was anything but German and, intensely relieved, I found it was Bastin. But Bastin so comically disguised that I had the greatest difficulty in restraining the noisiest of laughter. A huge white shirt flapped about well below his knees, big white trousers trailed on the ground, and his boots seemed enormous, covered as they were with thick woollen socks. Under his arm was tucked the huge white bundle, representing our entire luggage and grasped firmly in one hand was a small, yellow leather hand-bag

of which he was inordinately proud—was just the thing, he said, to complete his disguise as a commercial traveller. The white helmets made us all look like polar explorers, but, making a serious situation utterly ludicrous, on the top of Bastin's head was perched a little black felt hat. And here he came, actually running across the ground over which I had so laboriously crawled. But in spite of his strange appearance he was justified in running, for no sentries were visible on the top of the fort, although one of them might show up at any moment, making speed advisable.

Throwing himself on the ground in front of me, Bastin slid rapidly down the slope towards the buttress wall. I was handicapped by my ladder and scrambled down more slowly behind him. It must have been solely due to our snow clothing that we were not seen on this portion of our route; it was in full view of the sentries in the ditch and well lighted by the lamps. Luckily no untoward incident occurred and we were soon assembled in the narrow trench at the bottom.

It had taken us nearly an hour to get round the fort, and the time was now well after half-past three. According to our information, the relief of the sentries was at 6.30 and we should be able to scale the wall at about 6.35. We had a wait of rather less than three hours in front of us. The time was spent in joining and securing the two sections of the ladder and in fixing a small support half-way along its length to prevent the ladder from sagging when against the wall. A little later we took off our white clothing, arrayed ourselves in complete civilian clothes with

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the help of the kit from the big white bag, and made ourselves look as ridiculously German as possible. The camouflage clothing was put into the kit bag and carefully hidden in a snow drift.

It was exceedingly cold and, after finishing our various jobs, there was nothing to do but sit on the ground and freeze. Through the loopholes in the wall we could see some of the sentries, one of whom was only a few feet away. We naturally kept absolutely silent, although this was an almost needless precaution; the sentries were talking to one another all the time. Moreover, one of the men close to us had a hacking cough which he kept up for the remainder of the night, effectively drowning any slight sounds we may have made. At six o'clock we were standing by with the ladder in position, waiting to haul it over the sloping end of the trench and down a short path into the ditch. At half-past six an order was passed down the ditch and the sentries immediately began to move off.

The last man was just passing in front of our loophole, when there was a sound of footsteps approaching from the opposite direction and we heard a sentry exchange "Good morning" with some one else. Looking cautiously through a loophole, we saw to our astonishment two Germans coming down the ditch. Why on earth they were there we had not the slightest idea, but we were not long left in doubt.

In the ditch, just beyond the end of the loopholed wall where the trench sloped upwards, right across the path we had to follow, were two small sheds. In these sheds, constructed by order of the commandant, were

kept a small herd of swine. These pigs were being specially fattened, either for sale or else for the corpulent commandant's own table. When the two men who had just passed us reached the corner they stopped, and we could hear them open the doors of the sheds. Presently a joyful grunting sound was borne to us on the morning air and we realized that the pigs were being fed. According to our information—gathered by the French officer who had made the original reconnaissance—these pigs were invariably fed half an hour later, when we hoped to be away. In working out our scheme we had naturally completely forgotten their existence. It now came as a terrible blow to realize how precious time was being wasted by a change in the hour of the pigs' breakfast.

Minute after minute passed and still we could hear the voices of the two swineherds and the happy grunting of numerous small pigs. At last, when we were beginning to despair, we heard the shed doors being shut, and a minute or two later the men repassed, us going down the ditch. We waited until they had got to a safe distance, and then we decided that the time had come. With Bastin at the head, Hardy in the middle and myself at the extreme end of the ladder, we formed a strange procession as we clambered out of the trench and went over the top of the mound bordering the ditch.

As we came once more into the open, we realized that another unpleasant surprise lay in store for us: the sentries were already out on the top of the fort!

There was nothing to be done now, for it was too late to go back to our quarters. Stumbling about

in the deep snow we reached the ditch. As we passed the pig sheds, a small dog—fortunately chained up—started to yap and kicked up a terrific row. A glance up at the top of the fort showed us that the nearest of the sentries was looking directly at us. He made no move, but he would probably shoot when we were on the ladder; perhaps he had already warned the others. It had been our intention to put the ladder up against the wall immediately alongside one of the sheds where the ditch was shallower by a few inches. Now that the sentries on the top of the fort were watching us and could see exactly what we were about, we hurriedly decided that this was too unsafe and turning the corner in the ditch found ourselves temporarily screened by the wall behind which we had lately been hiding. Our fingers were numbed with cold and the miscarriage of our plans was beginning to make us lose confidence. Somehow or other we heaved the ladder up against the wall and Hardy and I held on to the bottom of it to prevent it from swaying and slipping, while Bastin slowly climbed up.

He reached the top and paused. Hardy and I were having trouble in holding the ladder steady at the bottom and for a few seconds we were unable to look up to see what was happening. After what seemed a very long time we glanced up expecting to see Bastin disappearing over the wall, but instead we saw that he was still standing on the top rung of the ladder and we realized that for some reason or other he was unable to get any farther. In a few seconds, he came down the ladder again and ex-

plained the situation. Apparently on this side of the fort the ditch was a few inches deeper than the calculations for the ladder had allowed. This under ordinary conditions would not have stopped us. But the top of the wall was covered with several inches of snow, which had melted a few days previously and then had frozen again forming a curved ledge of ice, upon which it was utterly impossible to get a grip. Unfortunately we had nothing with us with which to break the ice and no hooks or other instruments which would have enabled us to obtain a foothold upon the top. We discussed our position in agitated undertones and finally persuaded Bastin to go up and try again. He was the tallest of the three and probably the strongest in the arms, so that if he could not reach the top we felt certain that neither Hardy nor I could do so. Bastin again went up and struggled hard to get to the top of the wall. At one moment he had practically succeeded, only to slip back just as our hopes were beginning to rise. It was maddening. We had broken through all the German defences ; we were, to all intents and purposes, outside the camp, there was no one to stop us, and yet we could not go a step farther.

By this time we were really alarmed, and our position was critical. The dog near the sheds was still barking furiously causing two or three sentries to look down from the top of the fort at Bastin whom they could see at the top of the ladder, and about sixty yards away on our right, a crowd of German soldiers was beginning to assemble in the ditch for their morning inspection and roll-call.

Once more Bastin came down. It was quite impossible, he said, to get to the top of the wall and, even if we succeeded in doing so, there now appeared to be Germans on the outside of the camp, who would make it impossible for us to get away. We thought of carrying the ladder back to the shed where we knew we could reach the top of the wall, but this seemed to be quite useless, as several of the sentries could not help seeing what we were doing. Bastin thought that any further attempt was out of the question and that we might as well give ourselves up at once before we were shot at. At this point, Hardy suggested that there was just one more chance of our being able to get away. He proposed that we should walk boldly down to the right, through the group of German soldiers and out of the main gate of the fortress, which we could see was open to admit some of the Germans billeted outside the camp. It seemed our only hope and we immediately put it to the test. Extraordinary as it may seem, we marched straight down the ditch without attracting any particular attention, and passed right through the mob of some sixty or seventy German soldiers, who scarcely glanced at us. We made for the open gate and for a few moments I began to think that we were really going to get away, when suddenly we came face to face with a German N.C.O. who knew all three of us by sight. For a moment he was completely taken aback and his face was a picture of amazement. Then suddenly the realization of what was happening dawned upon him and he screamed loudly for guards. We were immediately surrounded by armed men,

fortunately too astonished to do us any bodily harm. The main gate was slammed shut and we were hurried back through the gloomy archway into the guard-room. Yet another of the best laid plans had gone "agley."



## CHAPTER XVI

**W**E were not ill-treated in the guard-room. Every one seemed to have something to say and we understood at last why the sentries on the fort had taken so little notice. They had apparently mistaken us for contractors who had come to inspect and repair the outer wall. Presently the guards began to realize that possibly some of them would get into trouble over the night's work, and their feelings towards us underwent a noticeable change.

Half an hour later one of the German officers, furious at having been turned out of bed so early and with very much of an early-morning face, dashed into the guard-room. He immediately ordered us to be searched, a precaution hitherto neglected. Luckily we had had time to get rid of the more important of our belongings such as false passes and maps, but most of the kit, including compasses, money, and of course all our civilian clothing, fell into the hands of the enemy. A guard of twelve men was then told off to watch us and we sat down and waited for some two hours, while the Germans telephoned frantically to headquarters for instructions.

At ten o'clock, without further warning, a N.C.O. and a fresh guard arrived and we were marched out of the camp down the main road to Cüstrin bound for jail. It was a marvellous day, the country glistening

white in the rays of a brilliant sun, almost as warm as in summer, and we raged inwardly to think that we should by now have been safely on board the Berlin train had our attempt met with success. But notwithstanding our failure Bastin refused to be discouraged. To him the road to jail would lead some day to freedom; the morning sun would prove to be the sun of victory: "*Le soleil d'Austerlitz*"; our recent reverse, the incentive to further efforts. His optimism was infectious and made us forget the prospect of many days to be spent in solitary confinement.

On arriving at the Citadel we were greeted by our old friends, the N.C.O.'s. in charge of the prison. We were searched once again and then locked into separate cells in different parts of the building. At midday I was given a bowl of soup, which was very welcome as we had had no breakfast that morning, but nothing else happened for the rest of the day, and the reaction after the previous night's excitement made us pass most of the time asleep. Next day I began to inquire whether we were likely to be in prison very long, and if in the meanwhile some of my kit could be sent to me from Zorndorf. The *Feldwebel*, who was really a very decent sort of man, said that he had no idea how long we were to be kept in solitary confinement, and that as far as kit was concerned he had instructions to allow us absolutely nothing for the time being.

During the following week I had plenty of time to realize again how bored one can get with one's own company. I had no kit of any sort except the clothes I stood in, and nothing wherewith to wash or shave. Smoking was, of course, forbidden in the prison and

in any case I had no cigarettes with me. We were allowed no books or newspapers, no bath, no exercise, no lights after dark and no food parcels from the camp. The cold weather continued and the heating in the prison was almost totally lacking. There was positively nothing to do but pace up and down the cell for hour after hour in the daytime, and go to bed, to try to keep warm, as early as possible in the evening. Not that the beds were by any means comfortable. They consisted of a wooden framework, with planks instead of springs, a thin straw mattress, and the roughest of army blankets.

At half-past seven each morning a bowl of tepid, *Ersatz* coffee was pushed into my cell, representing breakfast. At midday a bowl of soup and a small piece of potato-and-sawdust bread served the purpose of lunch and the menu for dinner consisted of a scrap of rather disgusting German sausage and another small piece of bad bread. It was evident that on this diet one could not get very fat, nor could one accumulate many provisions for escaping purposes.

The heavily barred window of my cell looked out on to a courtyard, guarded by three or four sentries. In the mornings, by standing on tiptoe on the head of my bed I could watch the more fortunate German prisoners; more fortunate since practically none of them were in solitary confinement and they were all given plenty of exercise and some sort of work. For us prisoners of war there was nothing but emptiness during each successive day. Truly, we could sleep or think; but it is remarkable, if one cannot sleep much, how tired one can get of thinking.

After ten days of this life, a German officer from Zorndorf was sent down to interview us. We were each subjected separately to a severe cross-examination with the evident intention of confusing us and forcing us to incriminate ourselves with some offence against German civil or military law. At the end of my cross-examination, I asked on what charge we were being held and how long we were to remain in jail. I was astounded to hear that, failing other and more serious charges, we were to be tried for theft and that we should be kept in solitary confinement until the trial took place. On my asking what we were supposed to have stolen, I was told that the Germans had found that the metal strips which had reinforced the sides of our ladder had been taken from several of His Majesty the Kaiser's beds. The obvious answer to this was that we had left the ladder within the precincts of the camp, we had not stolen, but merely borrowed the imperial strips of iron. I argued the point for some time with the German officer until he became furious and ordered me back to my cell. I heard from one of the jailers that Hardy and Bastin had also been complaining vigorously against their treatment; it was of no avail and life continued in exactly the same way. In the course of the next few weeks we had two or three visits from the old general in command of the Cüstrin area whom we had met on our previous stay at the jail. He was very sympathetic, but he could do nothing for us without direct orders from Berlin. Finally he obtained permission for us to have one hour's exercise each afternoon, but even for this short period we were not

allowed to be together. In spite of this continued separation from the other two, I was able to find out from one of the jailers more or less what they were doing and how they were faring.

One day I got a small note from Bastin, in which he told me that he had managed, using a broken safety-razor blade as a saw, to cut through one of the bars of his cell window. The note added that, if he could get sufficient bread and any other useful articles of equipment, he intended to try and get out of the prison in a few days' time. Bastin was fortunate in having a cell which did not overlook the main courtyard as did both Hardy's and mine. His window faced a small strip of garden, with a path leading round to the front of the prison and to the main road through the town. His equipment was by no means perfect, but it seemed as though he stood a good chance of success.

By dint of eating more or less nothing for two or three days, Hardy and I managed to send him a small quantity of food and also some articles of clothing. Our friend, the jailer, acted as intermediary, apparently thinking that Bastin was very weak or ill and not that we were helping him to escape. At length I got a note from Bastin saying that he was to try at nine o'clock that night, and that if we could we were to attempt to draw off the only sentry who was likely to give trouble. I had found out a few days previously that, when the sentries were at the far end of their beats, I could talk to Hardy, who was only a few cells away on an upper floor, by shouting through the bars of my window. We concerted a

rough plan for helping Bastin, and kept up a lively conversation in spite of the sentry's protests till half-past nine, when, no alarm having been given, we felt sure that he must have been able to get away. But a few minutes later a tremendous uproar from the front of the building told us that something untoward had occurred. Presently we heard much stamping of feet in the passage, accompanied by a lot of yelling and the noise of cell doors being slammed. The next minute the *Feldwebel* and several jailers burst into my cell, expecting to find that I too had been trying to escape. They were all very angry; and, as far as I could gather from their confused shouting, Bastin had succeeded in getting out of his window but had been chased and caught while in the street going through the town. I heard a few days later that the real cause of his capture was that a German soldier in the next cell had seen him getting out and had informed the Germans of his discovery on condition that some portion of his sentence should be remitted.

Bastin was ill-treated immediately after his recapture and badly knocked about by the infuriated jailers. As a result of his attempt a very much closer supervision of our cells was maintained, and every morning the *Feldwebel* came and tapped our window-bars with a heavy hammer.

Day after day passed slowly and drearily by, the monotony only relieved by such exciting events as a visit of inspection by a German officer or the arrival of a small parcel of clothing from the camp. Eventually after many complaints we were allowed such

luxuries as safety-razors and one or two German newspapers. With much trouble I persuaded the friendly jailer to supply me with about three cigarettes each week. The supply was not very regular, but such as it was it helped considerably to relieve the utter boredom of my existence. When each cigarette had been smoked down to the end, I carefully concealed the short stub under my mattress and in two or three weeks' time, having collected about half a dozen or so fragments, I was able to roll one or two extra cigarettes. Smoking a portion of a cigarette, washing, shaving and rereading an old German newspaper formed the daily routine. With the exception of marking upon the wall the passage of each day, there was still nothing to do but pace up and down the ten feet of my cell floor.

For the first month of our confinement, we were not allowed to receive or send any letters, but eventually, after an appeal to the old general, I obtained permission to write two. The first one was sent off and got home, but as I did not write the second one until several more weeks had passed, and I was getting really thoroughly "fed up" with prison life, I put into it more than was advisable in the way of bad language about the Germans and the injustice of our prolonged detention: A week later the letter was returned to me, having failed to pass the censor. This discouraged me and, being unable to tell anything approaching the truth, I wrote no more.

Over two months passed by without the Germans breaking their silence upon our ultimate fate, and I was beginning to despair of our ever being liberated

until the end of the war, when one day the general paid us a visit. The old man seemed quite pleased with the good news he had to bring. He told us that a decision regarding us would soon be made and that if we chose to give him personally our word of honour not to try and escape from the jail, he would allow us to be moved into another cell where we should all three be together. He would then issue orders for our parcels of food to be sent down from the camp and for our daily exercise to be extended. Since we had each of us long ago come to the conclusion that any attempt at escape from the jail was foredoomed to failure, we readily accepted this arrangement. The general was, of course, going quite beyond his powers in accepting our word of honour, for not only was it a point of German military law that prisoners of war were not to be put on parole, but our own regulations also forbade it. In this particular case the general was evidently moved by a feeling of common decency, and we on our part felt there was nothing to be gained by prolonging for a week or two our misery in solitary confinement.

A few days later we were moved into a large cell on the other side of the prison. To be able to talk to some one again after months of solitude was incredibly pleasant and for the first few days we were positively happy in our new abode. But at the end of ten days, when the newness had begun to wear off, we wondered how much longer we would have to endure even this form of confinement. Bastin suggested that if the Germans did not soon bring us to trial or send us back to the camp, we should ask



the general to release us from our parole and that we would then make a bold attempt to break out of the prison. He had worked out a scheme with a German corporal in prison for desertion. The corporal was to let us out of our cells and out of the prison with the help of a set of keys. He then intended to provide us all with bicycles on which we were to ride to the frontier. The whole scheme sounded rather quaint, and before we had been driven to this extreme the welcome news came that we were to be released within the next few days. At about the same time, permission came through from Berlin for us to have a real, full-sized bath. Strangely enough the prison had no facilities for washing, other than a few buckets of cold water. In order to get a bath therefore we were marched, twice in the last few days, under a heavy escort right through the town to a military hospital where we enjoyed the luxury of hot water.

On a certain Sunday in May, a German officer from Zorndorf came and informed us that proceedings against us were being dropped; that Hardy and I were to pack up our kit immediately and return to camp. Bastin was to be detained for the present and would probably be court-martialled in a few days' time for having damaged the prison by cutting a bar of his cell window.

Hardy and I left the jail that same afternoon, escorted by the usual armed guard, and were marched back to Zorndorf.

Bastin was court-martialled a few days later and sent to a fortress at Königsberg in East Prussia,

whence a few months later he succeeded in escaping. This time he justified his most optimistic hopes, crossed the Dutch frontier near Aachen and returned to fight in Belgium.

## CHAPTER XVII

WE found many changes in the camp when we got back to Zorndorf. Not the least of these was the change in the official reputation of the camp. After numerous complaints and under pressure of neutral opinion, Zorndorf was no longer to be designated as a "black hole" for the taking of reprisals, nor was it to be looked on as a prison for miscreants. It was to be just an ordinary camp situated quite by accident in an old-fashioned fortress, where the treatment of prisoners was to be as good as anywhere else in Germany. To heighten this impression several British prisoners had recently been brought straight from the scenes of their capture, on the Somme or Arras battlefields. From them we got detailed and first-hand news of the progress of the war. In spite of all their optimism, it was obvious that things were not going too well, and that the great struggle was likely to continue for a long time. This was very discouraging, but it certainly made us realize that we would have to continue trying to escape and that we should have plenty of time in which to execute our plans.

The difficulty of finding a good plan of escape from Zorndorf was now really very great. One of the greatest drawbacks was at the same time the great consolation for the failure of our last scheme: the

guards had been almost doubled. Sentries were on duty in the ditch all day long and extra men guarded the top of the fort. The number of German soldiers in Zorndorf at this time actually outnumbered the prisoners by more than two to one. In addition a company was held in reserve at Cüstrin periodically to relieve the men at the fort.

It was in February that the ladder scheme failed, and we were now in the middle of May. Snow schemes were out of the question, and the nights were growing shorter, making it more difficult for lengthy operations to be carried out under the cover of darkness. Most of the usual schemes had already been tried, and had either failed or had been discovered by the Germans after having succeeded. It required a considerable amount of imagination to plan anything sufficiently original to baffle the Germans. Hardy and I thought that an attempt to scale the wall by night should still be feasible, but, since the discovery of the hole in the chapel door, it was almost impossible to reach the top of the fort without being observed by one of the sentries.

We eventually decided that from a certain window at one end of our quarters it might be possible to climb up to the top of the fort, especially if heavy rain were to fall, or a thunderstorm kept the sentries away. We were to carry with us a long pole in sections, thirty feet of rope—knotted for quick climbing—and a specially constructed grapnel. Having reached the ditch, where again we counted on a storm to distract the attention of the sentries, the pole, with the grapnel secured at its upper end, was to be pushed up and

an attempt made to hook it over the projecting ledge at the top of the wall. If this succeeded we were then to scale the rope hanging down from the lower end. It was an absurdly risky scheme and quite hopeless in fine weather, but one night during a heavy thunderstorm we had proof that it might have worked. Had we been ready on that particular night I have no doubt that we should have succeeded, for at the height of the storm Hardy and I actually got out of the window in question, and noticed that the sentries were far away from their beats, taking shelter either in sentry-boxes or under the lee of the many mounds on the summit of the fort. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately for us, we never had another heavy storm during the whole summer, and although we got ready to try we never had the chance.

For a short time most of the British and the Belgians and some of the French, became extremely enthusiastic over a new tunnel scheme. The idea originated with a Belgian colonel who had commanded one of the Liège forts at the beginning of the war, and consisted in digging a series of short tunnels in various parts of the fort in an attempt to discover a secret subterranean passage leading out into the open country. Those who had had any previous experiences of fortresses stated that there was generally some such passage, used in wartime either for the reprovisioning or for evacuating the garrison. Personally I have not the slightest idea whether such passages do in reality exist, or whether there had ever been one beneath Fort Zorndorf ; but like searching for hidden treasure the idea appealed to us all tremendously, and we

started work with the conviction that we were going to find something.

The tunnel was commenced by the Belgians, and was provided with a cleverly concealed entrance beneath a doorway in their room. The shaft wound about in a most amazingly intricate way underneath the floors of the various rooms and eventually dived down beneath the foundations of the fort. Various branch shafts were then driven in different directions in the endeavour to find the secret passage. These attempts meeting with no success, we finally struck out straight towards the ditch. Whether we should come out in the ditch and make an attempt at scaling the wall, or whether we should tunnel right underneath and come up outside the camp, were questions which we never definitely decided, for after a couple of months of hard work the ever watchful Germans became so suspicious that we were compelled to abandon the attempt for the time being. Searches of various rooms in the camp were of daily occurrence at this time. On one occasion a party of us—including Hardy, Beverley Robinson, who had been at Mainz and had just arrived at Zorndorf, and myself—were just about to emerge from the tunnel, when the pre-arranged alarm signal was tapped on the floor above our heads and we realized that the Germans were actually searching the room belonging to the Belgians. We held our breath in an agony of suspense, but they were unable to find the entrance to the tunnel and we were able to get away unobserved.

Somewhere towards the beginning of June a party of British arrived from Ingolstadt. They had come

from the famous Fort 9, the counterpart of Fort Zorndorf. They had all escaped at least once before and were determined to renew their attempts. Amongst them was Medlicott, who by now had escaped from four or five camps, and one named Wilkin whom I was to know in the future as an expert at lock picking.

It was from this party that we first heard of the escape of Evans and Buckley, who had jumped off the train near Nuremberg. We heard nothing further about these two for several weeks and then a vague rumour came through from England that they had succeeded in crossing the Swiss frontier. This turned out to be the case and the story of their wonderful eighteen days' march across Bavaria to Switzerland has been told in that excellent book *The Escaping Club*. Buckley, by the way, had been captured with Ward, and it was remarkable to think that both pilot and observer had been able to get away.

Medlicott and Wilkin brought with them an extraordinary assortment of escaping kit and a large collection of tools for picking locks, forcing doors and cutting bars. With their help we at once set to work to pick the various padlocks, securing the door of the parcels room, and night after night we entered this place to secure the maps and compasses occasionally sent out from England. We were more than glad to have the assistance of fresh brains in Zorndorf for devising some new scheme for escaping, and we thought that Medlicott, with the reputation of having got out of almost every camp he had been in, might be able to suggest something really clever. But, although it was disappointing, it was at the same time a relief

to find that there was nothing we had overlooked. The idea of being able to find the secret passage leading out of the camp still lured us on and we dug holes in almost every corner of the fort, but it was all in vain. Hardy had an idea that there might be an entrance to the mysterious passage in the German part of the fort and that we might be able to get through by forcing two small iron grilles in one of the corridors. We set to work to cut through the bars of one of these grilles, but the Germans were too watchful. Several times we were nearly caught and the experiment was given up.

The time dragged slowly on and, as scheme after scheme was abandoned as useless, we gradually found ourselves with more or less nothing to do except to carry on a sort of guerrilla warfare against the Germans. Life in the close confinement of Zorndorf during the beautiful summer months became terribly dull. At that time I think that we should even have welcomed the sudden end of war. One by one, many of the British prisoners were shipped away to other camps and Hardy and I began to feel that we were permanent inhabitants. One day, Medlicott while running down a corridor tripped up over some obstruction or other and got water on the knee. He was sent to hospital for a few weeks and was then transferred to another camp. I did not know it, but it was the last I was ever to see of him.

At last in August, having exhausted all other possibilities of leaving Zorndorf, I suggested to Hardy that we should each write a personal letter to the general, saying that as we had been in Zorndorf for



almost a year we were beginning to suffer in health and requested to be moved to some other camp. I was able to make the additional plea that I wished to be allowed to rejoin my brother who had until recently been at Fort 9, Ingoldstadt. It was now over three months since we had returned from jail, six months since our last definite attempt to escape, and it was an unwritten, but officially recognized, law in Zorndorf that prisoners who had been there for over four months without attempting to escape had a chance of being transferred to some better camp. There was no answer to our requests for several days and then, suddenly, I was told to pack up my kit and be ready to move off with several recently taken prisoners. Hardy, on the other hand, was told that his transfer would not be considered for the present. It was a bitter blow to be separated, for we knew all the ropes of prison breaking by now, and we had felt convinced that we would cross the frontier together. It seemed certain that Hardy would be moved in the near future, but if we were to escape before the war ended we had to get away from the neighbourhood of Zorndorf as quickly as possible.

For all that, it seemed very sad to leave the accursed fort without one final and successful escape, and I spent my remaining days in vainly planning various futile ideas for last minute escapes. Had Hardy and I stayed many months longer in Zorndorf it is possible that we should have found a sure way out, but, as a matter of fact, in spite of one or two attempts no one ever escaped from the place that had seen the birth and death of so many fair schemes.

## CHAPTER XVIII

**I**N the afternoon of August 17th four other British prisoners and I were for the last time marched down the evil-smelling passage to the *Kommandantur*. Here we were subjected to a search of the utmost severity, being stripped stark naked while every article of our clothing was carefully gone over by German N.C.O.'s. In spite of this I managed to conceal two compasses, a set of maps of the Dutch frontier, two forged passes and several hundred marks of German money. I do not propose to reveal the various methods by which these things were concealed as it is conceivable that the information might be useful to me in the next war, but I must say that I heaved a sigh of relief when the search was over. We had the usual long and dreary walk down to Cüstrin and an hour's wait at the station before the train came in. Finally, we were packed into a second-class compartment, with four armed guards and an officer. Just before the train started, the guards carefully and very ostentatiously loaded their rifles in front of us. On arriving at Berlin, we were marched through the town to the Friedrichstrasse Station. While waiting for the train we were put into a small restaurant and allowed to purchase some light refreshments. At about six o'clock we were bundled into a train bound for Hanover and stations farther west. I began to have a

pretty shrewd idea of our destination. Various rumours had recently been current in Zorndorf about a new all-British camp at Ströhen, somewhere to the north-west of Hanover. The camp itself was not much more than a hundred miles from the Dutch frontier, and some Russian officers who had been there a year previously said that escape from it should be easy. After many months at Zorndorf, where the nearest neutral frontier was over three hundred miles distant, this sounded most encouraging. The sight of familiar names, on the coaches of the train, of German stations reasonably near the Dutch frontier gave me a thrill of excitement. On leaving Zorndorf I had taken steps to be ready in case there should be a chance of jumping off the train. But unfortunately there was no originality in the idea, and the Zorndorf Germans travelling with us were quite prepared for the event. A guard was placed in each corner of the carriage, with the German officer in the middle, and the windows were kept almost shut the whole time. The Germans told us that we were to travel all night and I decided to keep quiet and give as little trouble as possible so as to allay their suspicions. Next day there might be some chance of jumping off and at any rate we should be more than a hundred miles nearer the Dutch frontier. The night passed off peacefully enough and next morning, after going through Hanover and Minden, we reached the small town of Bünde. Here we waited for a couple of hours until the branch-line train came in. The journey from Bünde to Ströhen took about four hours, through hilly country for the most part where the speed of

the train seldom if ever exceeded thirty miles an hour. It was one of the most uncomfortable journeys I have ever made. I was in an agony of suspense the whole time, wondering whether the next minute or two would not bring the chance of a lifetime for a sudden jump out of the window. Again and again I edged cautiously towards the window and collected myself for a spring, but each time one of the guards or else the German officer was watching me. It may have been that I was not bold enough, but somehow I felt that one of those five Germans would either grab me or shoot at me before I could get out. Had it been night time I think I should have tried it, hoping to succeed as did Evans and Buckley, but it was broad daylight, the train was packed with German soldiers and I remembered only too well the ending of Pearson's attempt near Weilburg, when the train was stopped almost immediately after he had got out and he was chased by a score of soldiers. When at length we reached Ströhen and there was no more hope of escape from the train I began to feel rather ashamed at not having made a more determined effort, but I consoled myself with the thought that had I tried I should in all probability have gone straight to a hospital.

The camp lay two miles west of the station in open moorland devoid of houses and with only occasional clumps of trees. It was obvious that in breaking out of the camp it might be extremely difficult to find cover quickly, but the very flatness of the country made it seem nearer to Holland and encouraged one

in spite of other drawbacks. As we got close to the camp, which was surrounded by numerous sentries but only a single barbed-wire fence, I began to recognize several prisoners whom I knew by sight. In spite of the protests of the camp sentries and our own guard, they managed to shout out a warning that we would be searched before being allowed into the camp. We asked them what the place was like and, judging by the strength of the language they employed, the camp appeared to be somewhat below the average. I also asked for news of my brother and half a dozen prisoners at once volunteered the answer, accompanied with much laughter, that he was in prison under sentence of death! This seemed most encouraging, and with a feeling that new adventures were about to begin we marched in to the *Kommandantur*.

The search proved to be a very tame affair after all, and with the exception of one of my two compasses the Germans got nothing. This particular compass, a very small one, I had concealed in one of my boots. During the journey I had found that it got rather in my way when walking, I thought it best to remove it in case I succeeded in jumping off the train. I had no time to replace it in the hiding-place in my boot before arriving at the camp, with the result that as soon as the search started I more or less allowed the Germans to find it. They were so delighted at having captured something, however small, that they practically forgot to search us any further. We were then taken into another office where we were solemnly introduced to the commandant of the camp. He was a doddering old idiot of about seventy years of

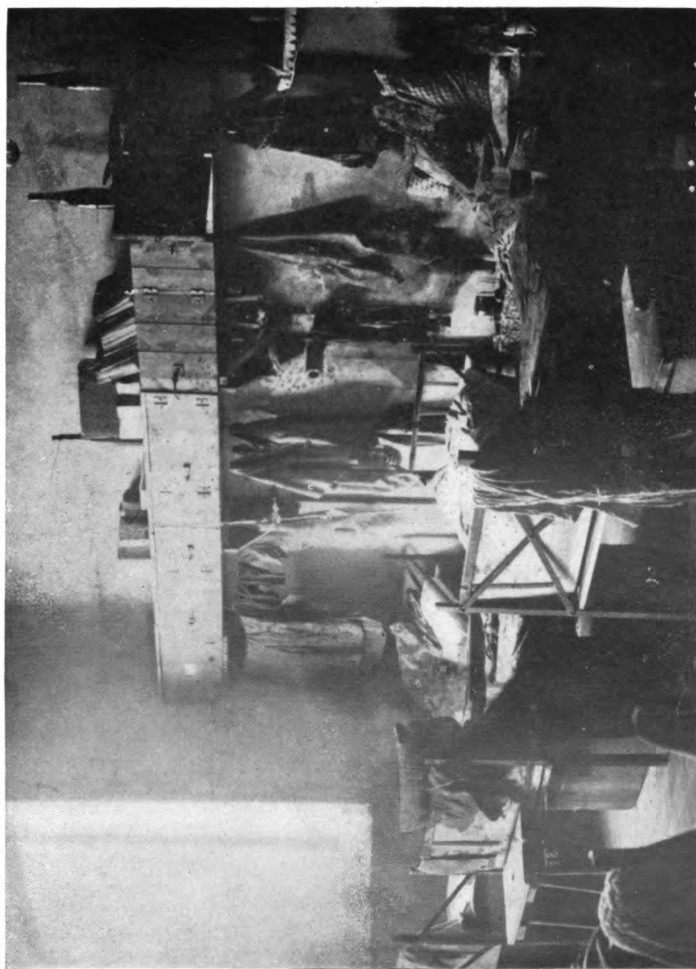
age, quite "gaga" and weak at the knees. He mumbled a few sentences about German military law and discipline which I had to translate to my companions, who had much difficulty in restraining their laughter. We also met the second in command of the camp, an odious person of the name of Niemeyer. This man and his twin brother, at that time in charge of Claustahl, were two of the most infamous of the German officers who had dealings with prisoners during the war. They had both lived in America before 1914, and it was said that one of them had been a billiard marker in New York and the other one a bar-tender in Milwaukee. Whatever truth there may have been in this, they were both despicable cads. I believe that the one who was at Ströhen died soon after the war, at any rate I hope so. He was very proud of his knowledge of English which caused us endless laughter. None of his phrases ever had the meaning he had intended them to convey and each one terminated with the ludicrous remark: "I guess, you know!" and "I-guess-you-know" he was nicknamed.

I noticed as we were ushered into the camp through the small barbed-wire gate that the prisoners who had gathered to watch us on our arrival hurriedly withdrew to a distance of over fifty yards from the entrance and kept on retreating until the gate was finally closed and the guards who had accompanied us were outside the camp. I asked one of the prisoners why they did this and I was told that only a few days previously some fresh prisoners had arrived, and the old prisoners having assembled at the gate to watch

them come in they were suddenly charged by about half a dozen sentries. For some unexplained reason the old commandant, who was standing close by, had told the guards to go in and clear the place and not to be afraid of hurting anybody. The guard were only too pleased and rushed upon the prisoners who were quietly walking away, and before anything could be done they had bayoneted two or three in the back ! Two of the prisoners were severely wounded and one of them, I believe, died afterwards, although of this I cannot be sure. At any rate it was a most disgraceful and unprovoked attack upon unarmed men, who not only were behaving quite normally, but were actually walking away in obedience to orders.

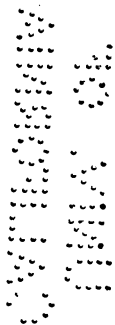
I was told that this sort of treatment was by no means uncommon in the camp and that, since one or two recent attempts at escape, parties of German soldiers were often sent into the camp to charge at prisoners who appeared to the authorities to be acting in a suspicious manner. Sentries had also been given orders to shoot any prisoner who was seen loitering near the barbed-wire fence, with the natural result that not only was the local jail full to overflowing with suspicious characters, but the interior of the camp was at times quite dangerous from stray shots and charging Germans.

The camp was about three hundred yards long and a hundred yards wide. It contained four large wooden huts, where the bulk of the prisoners lived, and several smaller huts where, mixed with the British, were several Indian native officers. A barbed-wire fence ten feet high surrounded the camp, with a line of sentries at



A TYPICAL ROOM IN ONE OF THE BEST OFFICERS' PRISON CAMPS IN GERMANY IN 1917





intervals of about fifty yards on the outside. Ten yards inside of this main fence was a smaller wire fence some two and a half feet high—the space between the two fences being known as the “neutral zone,” but where the “neutrality” came in is hard to understand, as although the Germans could walk in it with impunity any prisoner seen inside it was immediately shot.

On the east side of the camp there were two small extensions outside the wire, each extension surrounded by barbed-wire and provided with one gate into the camp and another gate leading out into the open country. In one of these extensions there were several small huts with separate cells comprising the jail, and in the other extension there was one large hut where some fifty British orderlies were housed. These men were variously employed either in fetching parcels or the German rations from the station, or else in cleaning the camp. Several small buildings, serving as guard-rooms and living quarters for about two hundred German soldiers, were on the west side of the camp. On this side there was also a small wired enclosure containing a very primitive shower-bath establishment for the use of the prisoners.

The camp had originally been used for Russian soldiers, but there was very little work for Russian soldiers to do in the neighbourhood and eventually the camp was condemned as unhealthy. It was therefore only natural that in the autumn of 1917, when German hopes of victory were rapidly rising, this camp should be chosen for the hated British.

The cooking arrangements were very primitive, the

sanitary conditions appalling, and at the end of a hot summer disease of some sort, encouraged by the presence of numerous flies, was almost unavoidable. At the time of my arrival out of about five hundred prisoners two hundred were laid up with what must have been a mild form of dysentery. A small hut in the camp, set aside as a hospital, was full, but as it only contained eight beds and there were practically no medical supplies it was almost entirely useless. A German doctor was, I believe, supposed to come to the camp twice a week, but very frequently he did not put in an appearance for a much longer period. Among the prisoners there was a pre-war medical student and one of the orderlies had been a stretcher bearer. Although both certainly did their best for us, it was little enough they could do. Fortunately the disease was not very serious; out of hundreds of cases only one man actually died. But many of the prisoners after a few days illness became so weak that they were unable to leave their beds and it must have been largely due to great care and cleanliness—and the use of cod liver oil—that considerable numbers of British officers did not end their days at Ströhen. I had been there scarcely a fortnight when I was laid up with this horrible illness, but not before I had made one rather ridiculous attempt at escape.

On the first day of my arrival a friend of mine, hearing that I came from Zorndorf and that I had a fairly complete kit, suggested that I should join him in a scheme to be tried within the next two or three days. I readily agreed, although I scarcely hoped to be able to shake the unhealthy dust of Ströhen from

my feet so quickly. The scheme I soon learned was known as the "Battering-ram," the idea being that a heavy iron bar normally a gymnastic horizontal bar which the Germans for some unknown reason had put up in the camp, was to be manned by six men who were to charge a small gate facing the *Kommandantur*. If the blunt end of the iron bar was aimed so as to hit the lock, the authors of the scheme felt sure that the gate would give way and the six men carrying the bar would rush straight on and out of the camp. Once the gate was open there was really nothing to stop them, for their course lay between the two *Kommandantur* buildings which would effectively screen them from the sentries until they were nearly a hundred yards away from the camp. There were a number of trees not far away, and it was hoped that the cover they provided combined with the darkness—the attempt was to be made just after nightfall—would ensure every one getting away.

The idea had the merit of being extremely simple and it certainly contained an element of surprise, but if the gate failed to fall at the first blow there was a very real danger of being shot. I was allotted a place at the tail end of the bar, until it was found that there were too many claimants for this honourable position. Another job was soon found for me. It was necessary to have some one standing near the gate not only to give the signal when both the nearest sentries were at the far end of their beats with their backs turned, but also to open the small gate in the inner fence giving access to the neutral zone. Unless this gate was open the party with the battering-ram

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would be unable to have a clear run at the main gate ; on the other hand if it was opened too soon, or when the sentries were looking, the alarm would naturally be given.

On the second day after my arrival I was told to be in readiness for that very night. I had been unable to obtain any civilian clothes, but with the Dutch frontier only a hundred miles away, this was not a matter of great importance if one was willing to make the journey on foot and by night. As the time drew near I became very worried about my particular job, especially after hearing all the stories about people being shot or bayoneted if they loitered too near the barbed-wire fence. But when the time came all seemed to be well and the sentries on duty hardly noticed me as I walked up and down near the gate.

At last just as it was getting really dark, I noticed the gang assembling. The iron bar had been brought up earlier in the afternoon and hidden in a corner of one of the huts near. Presently one of the gang strolled by, muttering as he passed that all was ready and that they were only waiting for my signal to begin. I waited a few minutes more and then gave the first signal to show that the coast was clear ; the gang could now pick up the battering-ram and get into position. I gave them a few moments and took another look at the sentries who were nearly a hundred yards apart and could dimly be seen in the growing darkness. Strolling towards the small gate I cautiously opened it. It squeaked loudly and I noticed that I would have to hold it open as it showed a tendency to swing shut again. So far the sentries had seen

nothing and I whistled twice softly to the other conspirators. From about thirty yards away there was a vague scuffling sound as the gang got into motion, and a few seconds later with much pounding of feet it came hurtling past complete with battering-ram. I have a distinct impression of feeling at that moment much like an old man at a level-crossing holding open the gates for the express to go by, and the next moment in my imagination the express was derailed and I was left looking stupidly at the accident.

There was a tremendous crash as the front man of the party hit the gate. In the darkness he had missed the lock with the end of the ram and it was with his face that he charged the wooden framework. In spite of the five strong men behind him, however, his face was not hard enough to push down the obstruction, and he let forth a yell that must have curdled the blood of all the sentries round the camp. The iron bar was immediately dropped with a loud clang, and the party having picked itself up made off at top speed in the direction of the huts. Somewhat dazed at the rapidity of these happenings I stood for a moment still holding the little gate open, gaping at the battering-ram on the ground. A loud report close behind brought me suddenly to my senses and I took to my heels as quickly as I could, much encouraged by the chorus of police whistles now being blown in every direction.

As I ran towards my hut I could hear some one thudding behind me and, passing the lighted windows of one of the other huts, some of the inmates leaned out and screamed abuse at the man behind me, who

turned out to be Niemeyer. Brandishing a couple of automatic pistols, he shouted to me to stop, and I have not the least doubt that had I done so he would have had the greatest pleasure in shooting me on the spot. The yells of the other prisoners, leaning out of their windows throwing things at him, and hurling insults such as: "Get out of the camp, you filthy Hun"; "I'll wring your neck, I-guess-you-know"; "Stop running, you dirty son-of-a-gun." This had the effect of turning him aside and while he stopped to deal with the others I managed to dodge into my hut. Next morning we had the inevitable search, but the Germans found nothing except the iron bar abandoned near the gate. A few days later I developed the camp disease and for a fortnight I was confined to my room, unable even to think of escape.

Not very long afterwards, when numerous attempts had driven "I-guess-you-know" to the verge of insanity, a properly organized search was made with the help of detectives from Berlin. From the time they entered the camp to the time they left, these unfortunate men were given no peace. Impeded at every turn, they were harried from one room to another. Contraband captured in one was but recaptured by the prisoners in the next. On leaving, surrounded by a band of cheering prisoners, several of them complained that their pockets had been picked and their identity cards and police papers stolen. And the very next day several more prisoners escaped.

## CHAPTER XIX

**O**N arrival at Ströhen I had heard that my brother was in jail, supposedly under sentence of death. This turned out to be almost literally true as, a day later, I heard from his own lips. One of the small huts overlooked the exercise yard of the camp prison and one could easily communicate with any of the prisoners who were out walking. The Germans seemed to have no objection to this proceeding and I spent several hours talking to my brother.

I had not seen him for nearly a year, since Friedberg, and he had a lot to tell me. He had been taken first of all to Fort 9, Ingoldstadt, where he had spent many months without being able to escape. He had then been moved up to Crefeld with a party of British, several of whom had managed to jump off the train on the way. Four or five of them had actually succeeded in crossing the Dutch frontier. My brother had only been a few days at Crefeld when the camp was broken up and all the British transferred to other camps. For two or three days the whole place was in absolute turmoil and several prisoners made attempts to escape in the confusion. Some of them succeeded in getting away, but my brother, who had hidden himself in a cupboard in an abandoned outhouse, was discovered at the last moment and duly despatched with the rest. He was sent to Schwarmstedt, a camp



very similar to Ströhen, but from which it was infinitely easier to escape. For the first few days, as far as I could make out from my brother and other prisoners who had been there, it was simply a case of walking straight out of the camp. My brother escaped about a week after his arrival with a man named Crossman, and made for the Dutch frontier. They covered the distance at quite a good rate and, after eleven days' walking, they were beginning to get close to the danger zone of the frontier. On the twelfth day some children found them in a wood, gave the alarm and eventually the whole of a neighbouring village turned out in pursuit. After dodging about for the better part of a day, they were caught and brought back to the nearest police station.

On the way while passing through some fields my brother and his companion threw away some malted-milk tablets, which had got damp during the journey and were consequently of no further use. One of the Germans escorting them back noticed the discarded tablets and picked them all up. On arrival at the police station he reported this to the authorities and, the story being duly embroidered, the fatal tablets were despatched to headquarters at Hanover, where an idiotic chemist declared that they contained anthrax germs. The German authorities naturally decided that this was an act of sabotage and consequently my brother and Crossman were punishable with death. They were hurried from jail to jail, finally ending up at Ströhen, where they were kept in solitary confinement for five weeks. During this period they made continued complaints to the Germans,

who answered with apparent indifference that their case was being decided in Hanover and that they would probably be shot. Subsequently they were allowed to engage a German lawyer to act on their behalf. This man evidently did his business very ably, for at the end of another fortnight they were suddenly released from prison and turned loose in the camp without any further reason or explanation being given them.

On the occasion when I had talked with my brother whilst he was still in jail, he had begged me not to escape until he was back in the camp and able to join me. As a matter of fact, although I nearly took part in one successful scheme, I was much too ill most of the time to think of leaving.

During the time that I was laid up a party of six prisoners managed to escape one night by hiding themselves under the wooden flooring of the bath hut. This hut was situated just outside the wire and every evening after dusk the gate leading to it was closed. At night time therefore the hut itself was beyond the line of sentries and there was nothing to prevent anyone in the bathroom from getting away. The scheme worked very well the first time, and although some of the party were recaptured later four of them, I believe, succeeded in crossing the frontier. The Germans were, of course, furious but quite unable to discover how the prisoners had got out. A few days later another batch of six tried the same thing, but this time the Germans had some vague suspicion as to what was taking place and whilst we were all assembled for roll-call on the parade ground a thorough

search of the camp was made, ending in the bathroom floor being torn up and the prisoners dragged off to jail.

The scheme which appealed to me particularly consisted in crawling down an open drain leading from underneath one of the huts to the barbed-wire fence. At this point where the drain ran under the fence, the wire had been extended downwards for a distance of about two feet and firmly picketed into the ground, but there were several pairs of wire-cutters in the camp, some of them home-made, others smuggled out from England in food tins. Armed with a pair of these it would not be very difficult to cut one's way out, provided that some one was on guard to give notice of the sentry's approach. The camp was rather badly lighted at this point and there was a deep shadow in the ditch, making it practically impossible for anyone to see a motionless figure lying at the bottom of it. Before I was well enough to try it myself, it was successfully attempted by a prisoner named Somerville, who cut the wire and crawled away without being seen by any of the Germans. He was followed by Collier, a friend of Mainz days, and Beverley Robinson, just arrived from Zorndorf. Somerville and Collier met again outside the camp and travelled together as far as the frontier. Here they separated and whereas Somerville succeeded in crossing the frontier, Collier sprained his ankle, was recaptured and brought back to Ströhen. Beverley Robinson, after a series of misfortunes, including the loss of his compass, was caught while sleeping in a barn by a farmer who had been disturbed by the clucking of his hens.

These various attempts, in addition to several others made before my arrival, put the Germans much more on their guard, and by the time my brother came out of prison escaping from Ströhen was beginning to be a more difficult problem. For several days we thoroughly explored the camp and discussed ways and means of escape. I had obtained a pair of wire-cutters, and we thought first of all that some sort of scheme involving wire-cutting by night would be the most suitable. But by now the majority of the possible places for this kind of operation were closely watched by special sentries. The German guard had recently been increased, and several additional electric lamps were being placed round the camp. The sentries were encouraged by the promise of a twenty marks reward for each prisoner they caught, and the alternatives of fourteen days' leave if they succeeded in catching us or fourteen days' jail if they failed. Moreover, those who failed in their duty were packed off to the front—the one place in the world that no German soldier ever wanted to see again.

In spite of these precautions it was rumoured that one or two of the sentries were open to bribery, and although personally I did not care to investigate the truth of this, being afraid that it might only be a trap prepared by the Germans, yet one or two other prisoners managed to find their man and to make good use of him. One night two prisoners got out through a hole they had cut in the wire under the very nose of a sentry, who could not have helped seeing them. They got away in the darkness, unnoticed, and the bribed sentry was wise enough not

to report the hole in the fence. The escape occurred early in the evening and it was not until next morning—by which time several other sentries had been on duty on the same beat—that the prisoners were missed. The Germans were consequently unable to accuse any one man and the sentry in question, evidently finding this a pleasant way of making money, allowed himself to be bribed again a few nights later. This time he was on duty near the bathroom gate and when during the evening a young Australian came up armed with a false key, opened the gate and walked out, the sentry resolutely kept his back turned. A few minutes after the Australian had got away, one of his friends passed me in the passage of our hut. He was on his way to collect his kit and walk through the gate, which was still open, and gave me this hint in case I wanted to follow on after him. I was not at all ready, most of my kit being dispersed and the important articles, such as maps and compasses, stowed away in rather inaccessible hiding-places. These hiding-places, either in the roof or under the floor of the hut, were difficult to get at quickly and by the time I had everything ready nearly a quarter of an hour had passed. I rushed down to the gate, still in uniform and without a hat. About twenty yards away I slowed down and sauntered past as nonchalantly as possible with my small bundle under my arm. The gate was still open and I turned and walked towards it. Provided one of the other sentries did not spot me, I was as good as out of the camp. But at that moment the bribed sentry turned round and came towards me. I did not see him at first and we both reached the gate at about the

same time. I hurriedly reached for a handful of mark notes, which were among my treasured possessions, hoping that a little extra money would tempt him to let me pass. But he was probably getting scared and the time limit was up. Before I could say a word to him he had quietly shut the gate, locked it and then walked quickly down his beat. There was nothing more to be done and I went disconsolately back to my quarters.

The next day the Germans kicked up a tremendous row, but again they were quite unable to find out from what part of the camp the escape had taken place. Again no sentries were caught or punished and I began to have hopes of being able to make use of the man after all. It was not so easy, for by now many other prisoners had got wind of the scheme, and whenever that particular sentry was on duty, a crowd of suspicious-looking prisoners would be seen loitering near his beat with twenty mark notes sticking ostentatiously out of their pockets. As a natural result the sentry became more wary and told one of the prisoners that he could not possibly do anything more, or else his comrades would begin to be suspicious. For all that, I believe that, if at this time we had been able to raise a moderately large sum of money in the camp, every single sentry would have grounded arms and we should have been allowed to walk out at any time of day or night.

The stock of simpler plans was becoming exhausted, something more elaborately audacious was required. After days of reflection we developed a scheme which was in many ways the most ambitious either my

brother or I tried during the time we were in Germany. We originally thought of dressing as Germans and marching out of the camp in broad daylight. This was reminiscent of Friedberg days, but in the entire camp at Ströhen there were only three German officers, each of whom was well known by sight to all the sentries. To make matters worse we knew for certain that passes were required for any individual leaving the camp. Among the guards, on the other hand, changes were very frequent and a new face would surprise nobody. We would therefore have to be disguised as N.C.O.'s or private soldiers, and at this point the difficulty of procuring the necessary uniform arose. At Friedberg we had the great advantage of having French and Russians with us, who could supply various important parts of the equipment, especially the Russian-German overcoat. At Ströhen not a stitch of German uniform was to be found, and it was obvious from the first that we would have to make it ourselves. As this became more apparent, we realized that it would only be possible to make one uniform, and it seemed that only one person would be able to get away. We did not see how my brother could be disguised as a civilian, for practically none ever came into the camp, and if, during the attempt, my brother remained in British uniform he would certainly have to be escorted by something more than a single private soldier.

The only prisoners taken out of the camp by a single German soldier were the British orderlies, a party of whom generally left the camp each morning. This gave us an idea and after studying it carefully

we came to the conclusion that one of us, dressed as a sentry, would take out the other, dressed as an orderly. We elaborated the details and decided it would be even better if there were two or three orderlies in the party, this being the more usual number to leave the camp.

We started at once to search for anything that could possibly be useful for the German kit. Our first piece of luck was the discovery that a recently taken prisoner had been provided, when in hospital, with a pair of German soldier's boots of the type that are pulled on over uniform trousers and reach half-way up the calf. The German Landsturm soldiers on guard round the camp wore similar boots over old grey trousers, and for our purpose a pair of ordinary dark flannel trousers would do just as well. There were a few pairs of these in the camp, and the lower part of the sham German sentry was therefore complete.

The upper part was not so easy. It was forced on us that we should have to make the service-dress coat either out of a dark blue blanket or else out of an old blue cricket blazer, of which there were several in the camp. The cap was a big problem, that worn by the sentries being rather tall and flat on top with a black peak and black waterproof cover. We hoped that we might be able to obtain one by bribery, or perhaps one of the prisoners at that moment in jail would be able to steal one from the warders. Meanwhile two main difficulties remained: the forged pass, and the rifle. We noticed that no party, however small, ever left the camp without a sentry with a rifle. We had not taken this into our calculations at first, but



now it became evident that some sort of gun would be essential. Naturally enough all rifles were kept outside the camp and there seemed to be absolutely no chance of stealing one. The only solution was to make a dummy. It seemed almost a hopeless task to undertake, but it had to be done somehow. Leaving the other problems to be solved later, we settled down to study the construction of German small arms.

## CHAPTER XX

**M**Y brother and I knew very little about rifles, particularly of the old-fashioned type generally carried by the camp sentries. But by dint of following any armed man who came into the camp and watching his rifle closely, we picked up the details and immediately made rough sketches of the important parts. We were neither of us much good at wood-carving, or at hammering out small pieces of metal, but we soon found a willing worker in a Royal Naval Air Service observer, named Hoblin. We showed him our sketches and explained to him what had to be done and on his agreeing to help us we took him into the scheme as "second orderly," my brother being "first orderly," and I, as the only German-speaking member of the party, the German escort.

The material for making the rifle gave us much trouble and we searched the camp fruitlessly for many days trying to find bits of scrap iron which would serve the purpose. At length we came across the remains of an old wooden picket, about two feet long by four inches square. The wood seemed to be quite seasoned and hard and just the thing out of which to make the stock. A few days later one of us was in the camp cook-house and found that an iron hand-rail in front of the range was not only loose and easily removable, but also was just about the

length of the German rifle barrel. We carried this off in triumph one evening when no one was about, and hid it with our other possessions beneath the floor of our hut. We soon unearthed another good piece of wood to form the support under the barrel, together with several bits of iron which might come in handy. Having secured these few trifles, we made a rough design of the gun and work on it started in earnest. We began by carving the stock out of the larger piece of wood. This was done mainly with table knives and later on we obtained a few small wood-carving tools, which the Germans had allowed one of the prisoners to retain. When the stock had taken shape, we finished it off with bits of razor blades, finally polishing it up with bits of broken glass.

We worked next on the dummy barrel, filing and smoothing the muzzle and scraping and polishing the whole tube. It was extremely difficult to get the right kind of blue appearance on the barrel, as we had neither sufficient heat nor the right kind of oil for the required treatment. It was not a matter of very great importance, German rifles being very old and worn. The breech proved very troublesome, for in the real rifle the barrel swelled suddenly to almost twice its average thickness, and in order to get this appearance we had to drive a short piece of thicker piping on to the dummy barrel, and then file down the edges so as to give an appearance of tapering. The stock and the extension under the barrel were screwed together and wired to the barrel. The skeleton of the rifle was now complete, but the most intricate parts such as breech mechanism, sights, trigger and

trigger-guard still had to be made. Again we searched the camp in vain for bits of useful scrap metal, and for several days work was suspended for lack of material.

Endless suggestions were made, put into practice and failed. Then Hoblin suggested that the breech mechanism could be made out of tin. He proposed to do this by first of all making wooden models of the various parts, copying them from the rifles we occasionally saw in the camp. None of us being skilled draughtsmen, it took us days of close observation to make sure of the various details, and many were the sentries in Ströhen at that time who must have been quite anxious about the way their footsteps were dogged round the camp. Eventually Hoblin completed the mechanism in wood and started to cover each piece over with thin sheets of metal taken from food tins. It was essential that each piece of tin should be bent absolutely smoothly, and that no dents or kinks should appear on the surface; each strip of tin being secured to its piece of wood by small French nails, driven in underneath where they could not be seen. When the complete breech mechanism was assembled, after many days of hard work, the bright tin was filed off each piece leaving the metal underneath exposed. I had at first been extremely sceptical of the result of this method of construction, but I must admit that when it was completed, polished and slightly oiled, it was quite impossible to tell the tin dummy from the real thing. The appearance of the rounded and sand-papered pieces of tinplate was exactly similar to that of heavy pieces of solid steel, and the remaining

details of the rifle were soon made from wood or tin.

Meanwhile my brother had been set to work on the task of collecting suitable material with which to complete the German uniform. He was also to try and find out details of the pass carried by every German leaving the camp. I think it was Darcy Levy, recently arrived from Zorndorf, who discovered what the pass looked like. While in prison he had become acquainted with a German corporal willing to accept a bribe. This man had first of all supplied him with various articles of minor importance, such as electric flash lamps, and after more money had been given him he had consented to supply maps and compasses. Darcy Levy found that in exchange for a loaf or two of white bread, a packet of chocolate and a cake of soap, he could purchase an excellent set of maps of the country between Ströhen and the Dutch frontier. One day he asked to see the official camp permit and the corporal showed it readily enough. It consisted of a small piece of pink paper, about four inches long by three inches wide, bearing the name of the camp, the soldier's company, regimental number and name, and words to the effect that the bearer could enter and leave the camp when on duty. It was signed by the commandant and bore the usual rubber stamp.

We thought this piece of paper would be quite easy to duplicate, until we found that there were no typewriters of any description in the camp. After a closer examination we even discovered that the passes were not printed upon pink paper at all, but upon a sort of oiled fabric, rather similar to the stuff out of

which a linen envelope is made only thinner and with a very smooth shiny surface. How on earth we were to manufacture this indispensable piece of our outfit was more than we could imagine, but, hoping that we should eventually be able to procure one by bribery or by theft from our friend the German corporal, we cheerfully left this difficulty to be dealt with last.

The information about the pass and the purchase of a complete set of maps led us to offer Darcy Levy a place as "third orderly" in the scheme. He accepted at once, and was most useful in supplying us with various articles of kit and in helping with the work on the rifle.

With the exception of the sling the rifle was now completed and, when we had assembled all the different parts, we showed it to my brother and Darcy Levy. They had been engaged on other business for several days and had not seen the progress made, so now when they first caught sight of it they were absolutely astounded, and for a few seconds I believe they thought that we had managed to get possession of a real rifle. The last detail—the sling—was made out of an old leather belt and the rifle was then carefully wrapped up in several old shirts and buried under three feet of sand beneath the floor of our hut.

By this time my brother and Darcy Levy, assisted by one of the orderlies, had finished the sentry's uniform. Only two things gave much trouble in this connection, one being the cap for which a black waterproof cover could not be found, and the other the bayonet and scabbard; we could scarcely trust the German corporal to supply either of these articles.

The actual cap did not matter much provided the peak was black leather, but the cover was unobtainable. We tried in vain various bits of oil-cloth and even pieces taken from an old Burberry; none of the material was stiff enough to answer the purpose. We persevered and after many experiments it was found that several thicknesses of brown paper, glued together and painted black, made a cover which would deceive even the sharpest eye at close range. The large brass "Iron Cross," affixed to the front of the cap, was the only thing which we purchased from our German, and he let us have it without any fuss, having no suspicion of our intentions.

A bayonet scabbard was made out of wood covered with leather which was sewn on and carefully darkened, but the guard of the bayonet hilt was quite another matter. In the real article the hilt consisted of a bar of steel, about four inches long, curving down at one end and up at the other, curling at each end into a sort of spiral knob. We tried at first to make this with the usual wood model covered with tin, but it was quite impossible to make the tin conform to the sharp spiral curves without dents appearing at the bends. We were unable to find a piece of iron which would answer the purpose, and in any case we had no suitable tools for making the curves. The only way was to cast it out of soft white metal. The required material was always at hand in the shape of white-metal spoons. We melted down a sufficient quantity of these and made a sand mould, into which we poured the molten metal. The result, although not an astonishing work of art, was quite satisfactory.

At the last moment we found that one other article had been forgotten, namely the ammunition pouch. This was hurriedly made, a block of wood taking the place of the ammunition and the leather covering being cut from an old flying coat. Some three weeks' work saw the German uniform completed and stowed away underground.

The disguise for the other members of the party was easily obtained from the orderlies, exchanged for some of our clothing, and we turned our attention once again to the question of the pass. We could get no help from our German friend on this score; he was quite willing to show us his own pass, but nothing would tempt him to part with it, as it was impossible for him to obtain another. There was no alternative but to manufacture one ourselves.

We made discreet inquiries in the camp, and at length found a prisoner, an excellent draughtsman, who thought he might be able to imitate the print on the pink pass. He made a few samples for us to see if the imitation was sufficiently good. These were passed as satisfactory by the members of the "gang," and we took him into our confidence and managed to show him the pass belonging to the corporal. But before he could start work we had to procure some sort of material which would closely resemble the peculiar pink linen previously described. Various methods of manufacturing this stuff out of pocket handkerchiefs painted pink, or with coloured paper, met with no success and we were beginning to despair, when one bright member of the "gang" suggested the red linen cover of an ordinary cloth-



bound volume. The colour was much too bright, but after sponging it over with water it toned down to the right shade of pink. The linen was very thin and in consequence the small piece we needed was far too flabby. We could not get hold of any starch, which I think would have been the correct thing to use, but we found that a thin coating of varnish had the desired effect, and by ironing it out while it was still damp we got a dead smooth surface. The pink square was then handed over to the draughtsman who at once got to work and in a few days produced an almost perfect forgery. He had written all the print with indelible pencil which, when slightly steamed, turned to a faint violet tone imitating perfectly the colour of typed ink.

During this time we had been endeavouring to cut out a good rubber stamp. I had never been very good at this, Hardy having done most of this work at Cüstrin, and it would have taken me weeks of practice to become perfect, but the draughtsman again came to our rescue and drew a stamp, complete with eagle, on the pass itself. This again he did with indelible pencil, well rubbed in and steamed rather longer so as to make the colour deeper than the type. The whole thing when finished could not have been done better, and we felt confident that no sentry would turn it down.

Our preparations were now almost complete, but one important question still remained to be settled : how to get our civilian clothes and food out of the camp. At Friedberg we had got over the difficulty by wearing our clothes under the German uniform

and sewing packets of concentrated food into specially made belts. At Ströhen this method was impossible, for the orderlies never wore heavy overcoats and not one of them was particularly fat. There was therefore no room under our scanty disguise to conceal provisions. We knew, however, that parties of orderlies were often sent down to the station with parcels or luggage belonging to prisoners who were leaving the camp, and that there would be nothing strange in our taking out some fairly bulky package. We decided that it would be best for all of us to put our kit and provisions into one large canvas kit-bag, and have this carried out by one of the sham orderlies. If questions were asked, we could say that this kit belonged to an officer transferred to another camp, and that the other orderlies were going down to the station to unload prisoners' parcels, which arrived in large quantities two or three times a week.

A few days before the attempt Darcy Levy suggested bringing in another man, named Parish, who had helped us in collecting indispensable articles of equipment. We agreed and he was allotted the place of "fourth orderly." The kit-bag, which now contained complete sets of equipment for five people, became almost too heavy to be carried by one man, and we were much relieved on hearing from the orderlies that, when luggage was taken to the station, either a hand-cart or wheelbarrow was generally used for the purpose. Accordingly we arranged with one of the orderlies that he should try to get the wheelbarrow left in front of the orderlies' hut on the day of our escape.

By the time our preparations were complete September was drawing to a close, and although my brother and I were anxious to delay the attempt a bit longer, in order to perfect our disguises and improve on some of the details of the scheme, it was decided that we should carry out our plan as soon as possible. One of the reasons for not delaying was that the weather might be expected to break up soon and make walking to the frontier very uncomfortable. There were also rumours that the camp might shortly close down owing to its impossible living conditions, and we were anxious to get away before being sent to some possibly remote part of Germany.

One day we heard that several new men had been drafted into the guard stationed at Ströhen, and it was obvious that we would stand a better chance if we made the attempt before these men became well known.

Immediately after the nine o'clock *Appell* on a certain morning in October, Hoblin and I crept underneath our hut and dug up the German equipment. It was then carried piece by piece, covered up with overcoats, to another hut not far from the entrance to the orderlies' quarters. Darcy Levy's room was in this hut, so that we were perfectly secure from outside observation. The rifle was given a final touch-up, and I donned the kit for the last inspection by the other confederates. An accomplice stood on guard to give me warning of the approach of any Germans, while my brother and the other three went back to their huts and put on their orderlies' clothes.

At this time of the morning various orderlies were continually passing from their section of the camp into ours, and, although there was a sentry on the gate whose duty it was to see that none of the officers got through into the orderlies' section of the camp, discipline was rather lax and he usually handed the key of the gate to one of the orderlies. On this day the orderly who got hold of the key gave it to one of the confederates, who opened the gate and went in. The key was then returned to the camp by means of another orderly, who gave it to the next one of the party, and so on until all four were inside. The kit was a more difficult affair, but with the help of the orderlies we had managed to smuggle part of it out on the previous day and the remainder was taken into the orderlies' hut that morning.

As soon as all the members of the "gang" were inside the orderlies' compound, I was warned by the accomplice who was keeping watch. It was now my business to wait until the camp was more or less clear of one or two Germans who had either been superintending the *Appell*, or who were now watching the fatigue parties of orderlies clean up the camp. When these parties had finished work, the orderlies would again be locked up in their compound and the sentry would move away from the gate. Work in the camp went on for longer than usual that morning and I found that time was slipping by and I dared not wait any more. The sentry on the gate had walked off a little way into the camp and it looked as though I should be able to pass him without any difficulty. I put the finishing touches to my uniform and the

moment the "all clear" signal had been given by one of the watchers I walked out into the camp. I was immediately assailed with an almost overwhelming fear of discovery and for the first few seconds I could hardly tell in which direction I was walking. Then as no shots went off, no shouts came from the sentries and no whistles were blown, I gained courage and went on to the gate. The sentry who should have been there was still standing about twenty yards off and greeted me with a smile and a "Good morning." A little farther off I could see our old friend the German corporal, possibly enjoying what he may have guessed were partly the fruits of his corruption.

Just before starting I had been handed the gate key, which had been brought back once more, and I had no difficulty in getting inside the orderlies' compound. I left the key in the lock in case we had to beat a hurried retreat, and marched up to the hut. On looking in at the door I found the whole "gang" assembled, peering out and laughing at me. There was no sentry in sight for the moment and I gave them an answering grin. The first and in some ways the most difficult part of the scheme had worked out most excellently. We had broken through the first line of defences; we were practically out of the camp. There was only one sentry between us and freedom.

## CHAPTER XXI

**O**UT of the corner of my eye I caught sight of the sentry at the gate through which we were to pass, glancing in my direction and it struck me that it was time to carry on with the details of the scheme. Adopting what I considered to be my most Teutonic tone, I called for four orderlies to fall in in front of me. The four confederates trooped out of the hut and slouched up as slowly as real orderlies would have done had I been a genuine guard. As soon as they had fallen in I pointed to the large canvas bag of kit, telling them to load it on to the wheelbarrow, which was standing conveniently near, and accompanying my commands with suitable gestures to make the "English pigs" understand.

When this had been done, I waved them towards the gate and gave the order to march. The procession started off in good style, taking care not to go too fast, and we soon covered the thirty yards separating us from the gate. On seeing us approach the sentry came up and peered through the wire. When we were close enough I produced a cloth-covered card case, opened it and showed him my pass. He glanced at it muttering something about "going out to work I suppose," and then slowly produced the key and unlocked the gate. I stood aside while the confederates trooped out, my brother coming last with the

wheelbarrow. The moment we were all clear, the sentry turned and closed the gate behind us. We were now right outside the camp and everything seemed to be going well. In another two or three minutes we would reach the cover of the trees on the main road, when we would be safe from pursuit for a considerable time.

And then I noticed that the sentry had started to follow us. Going as slowly as we were he had no difficulty in catching up and keeping pace with us. We had gone barely thirty yards when he came up to me and said in a low voice :

" You ought to be careful of that party of orderlies, I can recognize an officer amongst them."

" An officer ? " I said. " Impossible ! I know all these men by sight."

" You are wrong," he answered ; " that man pushing the wheelbarrow is Hauptmann Milne. I used to be on guard in the camp prison and I know him well by sight."

" Anyway," I retorted, " I shall keep my eyes open ; he won't be able to escape from me."

" But there may be other officers in the party," he insisted ; " they may all be trying to escape. I don't think you should go any farther with them."

I tried to laugh off my embarrassment and said :

" That's all right, you leave this to me."

But by this time the man was beginning to get thoroughly alarmed.

" No, no ! you *must not* go any farther," he said. " I know that one with the wheelbarrow is an officer

and I think I recognize one of the others. You must take them back into the camp at once."

I did my best to pacify him; I argued with him:

"Oh, but, come now, these men are all right, and we have to get down to the station at once and send off this luggage and then unload some wagons that have just arrived."

"I can't help that; you had better take them back into the camp at once and have them searched—or else I shall have to alarm the guard. Hi! come back," he shouted, as the two farthestmost of the confederates, Darcy Levy and Parish, impatient of the delay, started to wander off, hoping no doubt to get away unobserved.

"It's no good," said the sentry, "I must alarm the guard."

And he blew his whistle.

At this we all realized that the game was up. In broad daylight, with cover over a hundred yards away, and many armed sentries between us and safety, it was no use bolting. The best thing was to make an orderly retreat. With this end in view, I reassumed command of the party and ordered them to go back at once to the orderlies' enclosure. Fortunately our sentry fell in with this idea and accompanied us back to the gate which he opened. While the members of the "gang" filed reluctantly into the enclosure, I went on protesting to the sentry that everything was all right and that he was causing a lot of trouble for nothing. The man was now thoroughly exasperated and very suspicious, and as I



stood there arguing with him he started to look me over in a most unpleasant way. Up to this time he had apparently had no idea that I could be anything but a German soldier, but now it seemed to dawn on him that something was wrong.

"Who are you, anyway?" he asked. "I have never seen you before." A slight pause, during which I tried to tell him my name. "And what sort of a bayonet have you got there?" striking at the weak point in the equipment. "And that ammunition pouch looks rather different to me."

He clenched the argument by slamming the gate in my face. As there was nothing more to be said I turned tail and hurried off after the others, who by this time had safely reached the shelter of the orderlies' hut.

Once inside the hut I got rid of my uniform and equipment in double quick time. There was not a moment to be lost if we wanted to save our kit and get away ourselves, for the sentry had started blowing his whistle again and we could hear the shouts and whistles of the guard, which had been turned out and was arriving at the double. The other confederates thought they could hide all their belongings in and under the hut we were in and then wait, dressed as orderlies, until all the excitement had blown over. But I had an idea that there was still a chance of getting back into the camp before the Germans arrived, which would give me time to put some of the more valuable articles of kit, such as maps, money and compasses, into really safe hiding-places. My German uniform and rifle were quickly hidden by the orderlies, either

in their hut or down a drain, and immediately after seeing this done I left the hut by a window on the side farthest from the Germans and nearest the camp.

I made straight for the gate through which we had entered the orderlies' enclosure, but on reaching it I found to my dismay that it was locked and the key nowhere to be seen. A squad of Germans had already arrived and were ordering the orderlies back into their hut. I was unable to go back to get help and for the moment it seemed as though I should be caught with the "goods" on me. It was useless to try climbing over the gate; it was about ten feet high and had several rows of barbed-wire at the top. Luckily I noticed that there was a loose strip of wire at the foot of the right-hand gatepost. I knelt down and wrenched at it as hard as I could; it gave a little, but not quite enough to let me get through. I looked around, not knowing what to do, and caught sight of one of the prisoners inside the camp. I shouted to him, and he at once ran up and joined me in my struggles with the wire. But my shout for help had attracted the attention of the Germans round the orderlies' hut. Two or three detached themselves from the group and rushed towards me, unslinging their rifles and yelling at me to stop. Just in time the wire fence gave way and I managed to wriggle underneath it into the camp. With the man who had helped me, I sprinted across the camp and made a dash for the cover of the nearest hut. Fortunately the pursuing Germans had no key to the gate and, while struggling with it, they forgot to shoot. Once inside my own hut I lost no time

in disposing safely of the gear I had brought away.

I was not yet out of the wood, for I felt certain that if the whole camp was assembled and the sentry on the gate brought in to identify me he would be able to do so. I at once changed my clothes, removed my moustache and had my head shaved by the camp barber—an English orderly. The “disguise” served its purpose for a few hours, but that evening I was sent for from the *Kommandantur* where, in spite of my protests of innocence, I was easily recognized by the sentry, placed under arrest and thrown into solitary confinement in the camp jail. The other confederates, caught more or less red-handed in the orderlies' enclosure, had preceded me and had already secured the most comfortable cells.

The jail was full to overflowing at the time I went into it and partly because of this, but mainly because the Germans looked upon me as the ring-leader of the “gang,” I was put into a cell which, owing to its tumble-down condition, had been condemned as unfit for prisoners to inhabit. The whole of the prison was built of wood, as were all the buildings in the camp, and there were large chinks in the walls of my cell letting in the unpleasantly cold autumn winds. The glass of the little barred window was broken; the roof let in the rain. The details of prison life, the same here as in other jails, are hardly worth reiterating: no extra clothing; one worn-out blanket on my bed; no books; insufficient food; no exercise.

On being arrested I had refused to admit my share in the attempt, thereby annoying the Germans con-

siderably, for the sentry's unsupported evidence would not be sufficient if we were brought to trial. Being quite convinced of my guilt, the commandant of the camp made it a condition that I should be allowed extra food and clothing if I would but confess. This seemed rather like torture and, hoping for an early release or a chance to escape, I prolonged the agony for about ten days. At last, recognizing that my attitude could serve no useful purpose, I summoned the jailer and asked him to tell the commandant that I had confessed, and that if an invitation to a court-martial were issued to me I would willingly attend could I but have an extra blanket on my bed at night. The commandant at once permitted me to have most of the things I wanted, with the exception of cigarettes.

I had thought that, after this, events would move fairly rapidly and that we should soon be sentenced to some short term of imprisonment. I was quickly disillusioned. For, as the days dragged into weeks and the weeks themselves began to mount up, I realized that the authorities were playing the same game with us as at Cüstrin, and that we might be kept there for many months before a decision was arrived at.

The weather during October was extremely bad, and after many days of continual rain my cell resembled a swimming bath. Walking up and down my cell—the only form of exercise—became almost out of the question, as once my boots were wet I could not get them dry again. The alternative was to sit on a damp bed all day long, covered with a

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blanket. After a week or two I caught a bad cold, and one night I woke up with a pain in my chest and the worst headache I have ever had. Next morning I felt very ill and asked to see the doctor. The German doctor was, of course, not available, but a British officer, ex-medical student, came to my rescue with a thermometer and some asperin. My temperature was 104 and, on hearing this, the German authorities kindly consented to put me in a drier cell. In a dry bed and with lots of asperin I felt better, but next day my temperature was still high and the authorities were compelled to admit me to the camp hospital.

As a hospital it was nothing very wonderful, but at least it was warm and dry. I stayed there for a fortnight, fed on asperin and cough mixture, and occasionally attended to by the German doctor. The majority of the cases were not very serious and after a few days, when I was beginning to get better, it was really quite pleasant. One of the occupants, a Tasmanian, had been shot through the leg while trying to escape. There was also an Indian native officer, off his head, who had tried to commit suicide by carving his stomach with a razor blade. He was recovering from his wounds but not from his madness, and, being convinced that he was already dead, looked upon us as the denizens of hell. He was quite a pleasant fellow in his saner moments and we were all very sorry for him. He was eventually moved by the Germans to an Indian camp, where, I believe, he died.

Many prisoners used to come to the hospital daily

on the pretext of visiting the sick but in reality to plan some method of escape; the hospital being situated close to the fence, it was considered suitable as a jumping-off place for an attack on the wire. To visit me one day came Beverley Robinson with a pair of wire-cutters, a compass and a set of maps. He suggested that as soon as I was convalescent we should make an attempt at wire-cutting together. I naturally agreed and at the end of my second week in hospital we decided to start work.

The advantage of the hospital as a starting-point lay in the fact that it was placed in one of the worst lighted parts of the camp, there being no electric lamp for nearly a hundred yards on either side of it. The first night on which we tried all went well, but the sentry was a little too watchful and we could only cut a few strands in the first fence guarding the neutral zone. The next night I climbed out of the hospital window; working in the shadow, a complete section was cut out of the first fence, and we started work on the outer fence. I wore gloves and a dark woollen muffler round my face to make certain of not showing up against the darker ground. Nevertheless, the sentry was again too close for a final attempt to be made on the outer fence. We contrived to fasten up the flap we had cut out of the first fence with a single strand of wire so that it would not show during daylight. and then put off the attempt for another night. But in the course of the next day it became evident that in spite of our precautions the Germans had noticed something, as a party of men came along and inspected the wire. Shortly afterwards, on the same

day, a new lamp was brought along and much to our dismay some workmen started to erect a pole immediately opposite the hospital. That night, although the new lamp was not yet in working order, an extra sentry was put on, effectually preventing us from making a further attempt. Worst of all, the German doctor visited the hospital two days later and passed me as fit ; whereupon I was immediately sent back to the jail.

For a short time Robinson, arrested for some unsuccessful attempt elsewhere in the camp, was put in a cell next door to mine. We were both very fond of chess and, having obtained two sets, we spent the next few weeks in playing a most amusing series of games, shouting the moves to one another through the wooden wall which divided our cells. This method of playing had one great advantage ; whenever it seemed likely that I was going to be beaten, which was more often than not, I was able to put matters right by pretending that the positions on my board were quite different to those of his, a state of affairs which must have arisen through my misunderstanding one of his calls.

There was still no news from the Germans as to our fate and when, in the middle of November, my brother and the rest of the " gang " were suddenly moved to another camp, I felt that I had probably been forgotten and was destined to stay in jail for ever. At last came the welcome news that I was to be tried by court-martial. Upon what charge and whether the rest of the " gang " were also implicated I did not know. In any case it was the end of the tedium of jail and implied the possibility of being sent to a new camp. On

November 21st I was allowed into the camp for an hour to pack a few belongings into a suit-case and to get ready to leave for Hanover on the following day. I found that I would not be alone as there was another prisoner also going to Hanover for trial. My only regret was that, owing to a very strict search which I knew would take place before we left, I would not be able to take any escaping kit with me. It was perhaps just as well, for we had recently had a spell of very hard weather with a lot of snow, and I was not altogether fit after my recent illness.

At an early hour the next morning we left for Hanover which we reached at nightfall after an uneventful journey. We were marched through the town, unpleasantly cheerful with a foretaste of Christmas, to the civilian jail where we were lodged for the night in filthy cells. The next morning at ten o'clock, I was taken across to the army headquarters and shown into a waiting-room where I came face to face with my one-time confederates. We spent a most amusing morning, talking and laughing loudly the whole time, except during the actual proceedings of the trial, which lasted only a quarter of an hour. There being no interpreter present I had to act as spokesman for the party, causing us all a lot of quiet laughter. The other members of the "gang" refused to take the trial seriously and kept up a cross-fire of the most absurd questions, which fortunately were not understood by our judges. In the end we were sentenced to terms of imprisonment varying from four and a half months in my case down to three months in the case of one of the "gang" whom the judges evidently considered



not to be responsible for his actions. Luckily they had heard of the long period we had already spent in jail, and showed sufficient appreciation of this fact to allow us the option of a fine. I forget the exact amount, but it worked out at something between five and ten pounds per man. We were getting very tired of jail and, stipulating that the money should be paid into Red Cross funds, we agreed to the fine. And somehow I have a feeling that very little of it was ever paid.

Just as we were leaving the court at about midday, thoroughly pleased to have no more prison time to serve, we were recalled and told that of course the invariable rule of fourteen days' disciplinary punishment would have to be observed. We protested loudly against this, but it was of no use and we were marched out. We had lunch at the buffet at Hanover Station, after which my brother and the other three were taken back to their camp at Holzminden, and I and my companion—who had also escaped with a small fine that morning—took the train for Ströhen.

All went well until we got to the small junction at Diepholz where we had to change into the slow local train stopping at Ströhen. Unfortunately our train from Hanover was about an hour late and we missed the last train that night. The station was very small and had no proper buffet or waiting-room in which to spend the night and our guards, anxious to get back to their own quarters, were naturally furious at being kept out in the snow. We had got on quite friendly terms during the journey back from Hanover, and I suggested half-seriously to the guards that I should

order a special train. The *Feldwebel* in charge, who was what the Americans call a "dumb bell," thought this an excellent idea and took me up to the station-master to whom I repeated my request. He seemed rather surprised at first, but much impressed by the *Feldwebel's* statement that all English prisoners were "*kolossal reich*," he allowed himself to be persuaded. The station staff were at once called up and various orders given with the result that a few minutes later, with a great deal of puffing, an engine and two carriages were shunted up alongside the platform. There were several other passengers who, like ourselves, had missed the last train and were only too ready to avail themselves of the invitation which we extended to them through the *Feldwebel*.

My companion and I were just beginning to chortle with delight at the idea of riding home in such unusual luxury when, as luck would have it, a bustling and interfering German officer turned up. After a short conversation with the station-master he told the bewildered officials that it was utterly impossible to allow prisoners of war to carry on in this high-handed manner. Very reluctantly the engine driver, to whom we had promised a substantial tip, shunted his little train out of the station into the siding again. Meanwhile we were hurriedly led out of the station by the *Feldwebel*, who thought it would be as well to keep clear of the German officer and avoid awkward questions. Some of our guards knew the town well and suggested going to a small inn a few hundred yards from the station. We reached it a few minutes later and found that although small it was old-fashioned

enough to be clean and comfortable. We were given some food and then shown into a bedroom on the first floor. As we neither of us had any escaping kit with us, any attempt to escape during the night was out of the question. But, in order to make doubly sure, we were locked into our room and our boots were taken away. In addition a sentry was posted in the garden outside. We passed a rather restless night, being unaccustomed to the delights of a spring mattress and clean sheets. Next morning we caught an early train back to Ströhen, where we arrived without further incident.

As soon as I got into the camp, I was escorted back to prison to complete my sentence. I fancied that in accordance with the court-martial decision I should only have fourteen days in jail, but apparently the sentence had not yet been promulgated and it was nearly three weeks before I was told that I still had another fourteen days to serve. This time imprisonment was not quite so unpleasant. The jail was almost empty and, as a result, I had a cell to myself which generally served for two prisoners. I was also allowed all the books I wanted and most of my kit. Collier, recently recaptured, was in the cell next door and through our thin wooden partition we held long conversations on every imaginable topic. We discussed innumerable plans for escaping from Ströhen all of which were suddenly brought to naught by a rumour that we were to be among a number of prisoners shortly leaving for another camp.

As usual the idea of going to a new camp was quite exciting. There would probably be some chance of

escaping *en route*, and one never knew if the Germans in the new camp might not be entirely ignorant of the ways of prisoners, thus making escape easy. In the first week of December these rumours took definite shape, and we were informed by the authorities that more than eighty prisoners including ourselves were to be transferred to a camp somewhere near the Alsace-Lorraine border. We gathered that a number of small camps were being established in this neighbourhood, in the vicinity of important industrial centres, to hinder the bombing of these towns by Allied aircraft.

On December 6th Collier and I were released from jail in order to pack up our kit and make ready for our departure which was to take place on the following day. My last night at Ströhen was really quite amusing. Not only were eighty of us leaving on the following day, but a number of prisoners of over three years' standing were due to be exchanged to Holland against an equivalent number of German officers from England, under an agreement recently made between the respective governments. The remainder of the prisoners were also to be moved to other camps shortly, for the Germans had at last admitted that Ströhen was impossible as a camp for prisoners of war. The evening was therefore rather in the nature of a farewell party celebrated with much beer and a small consignment of port, which had just arrived from England—by international agreement, labelled "medicine!"

Next morning, in spite of thick heads, we devoted our remaining moments to secreting about our persons and in our luggage the various valuable articles of our

escaping kit. At midday, accompanied by a large party of armed guards, we were marched down to the station, followed by the cheers of the remaining prisoners.

## CHAPTER XXII

**O**UR journey lasted for nearly two complete days and during the first part of it we had good cause to wonder where on earth we were being taken. The train left Ströhen in the direction of Bremen and after a couple of hours' travelling, when we could almost smell the sea, it turned south-west. Then it wandered slowly around through all the points of the compass until eventually towards midnight we found ourselves in the Ruhr district.

Next day our train followed the course of the Rhine as far as Bingen. Collier and I and two others were in a carriage with two German sentries, and several times during the journey we fancied there were chances of jumping the train, but we were poorly provided with kit and the line we followed lay a good way from the frontier. Our guards, a couple of unpatriotic black-guardly communists, told us they were quite willing to allow us to escape if we would only give them a loaf of white bread, a cake of soap or a packet of chocolate. Apparently like other Germans of the same type they were not in need of these articles themselves but knew of individuals to whom they could sell them for a good price. On the whole we thought it best not to trust these men; they were quite capable of accepting a bribe and shooting afterwards.

Although we travelled for most of the way in the

oldest of third-class carriages, our journey was not too uncomfortable, and every now and then the train would stop at a wayside station where, at exorbitant prices, we were able to purchase rather indifferent meals from the Red Cross canteens. At nine o'clock on the morning of the second day, we arrived at the station of Neunkirchen. I suppose most of us had never heard the name before and we were surprised to find that it was quite a large mining town, situated some ten miles from Saarbrücken.

We were marched through the town, loudly booed and jeered at by the populace who, not having seen British prisoners before, no doubt imagined that we were the fruit of the recent German counter-attack in the battle of Cambrai. Having crossed the greater part of the town, we were halted in front of a funny, drab little two-storied building. Across the front in faded letters of gold were the words "Catholic Friends Meeting House." As a prisoners' camp it was evidently brand-new, for the wooden palisade had, judging from the fresh sawdust on the ground, just been erected. After a few moments' delay the gate was opened and we filed into the house.

We were ushered into a small room labelled "Billiards," and our guards left us. At the far end of this room there was what appeared to be a boarded platform about four feet high. Intent on finding as soon as possible some suitable places for hiding our compasses and maps, some of us set to work to pull up the planks and see what was underneath. One or two of the planks came up quite easily, and to our amazement we found that they concealed an ordinary public-

house bar. We also discovered that the back of the bar connected with a much larger room by means of a small door. Half an hour later when our names had been taken and a mild search had been finished with, we were allowed first of all upstairs where we discovered a long, narrow room, probably once used as a sort of banqueting hall, and two or three other smaller rooms on the top floor under the roof. The doors downstairs were then opened and we were allowed into the large chamber of which we had caught a glimpse from behind the bar in the "billiard" room. In all of these rooms, with the exception of the small rooms beneath the roof, we found concealed bars with all the mechanism for serving large quantities of beer. The "Catholic Friends" had evidently been pretty good fellows in their time!

The large room downstairs presented a most peculiar appearance. It contained a bar on each side of the entrance and had originally been a theatre or concert-hall, for at the far end there was a stage, the place of the curtain now being taken by stout planks. A gallery ran round three sides of the room, a few feet above our heads and on one side there were eight windows, four in the gallery and four underneath it. There were no windows in the other walls of the room, which was filled with sixty-four beds, one above the other in pairs like sleeping-car berths, leaving practically no open space anywhere. On the side where the windows were placed, a small glass door gave on to a courtyard surrounded by a brick wall and measuring only twenty yards long by ten yards wide. On the far side of this yard was what looked like a long shed,



which we presently discovered was an old and much decayed bowling alley. A few melancholy soot-covered trees grew around the sides of the yard which was overlooked from above a brick wall surmounted by barbed-wire, and various tumble-down houses. It was not a very cheering spot and naturally gave an impression of overcrowding confinement, but the general aspect and contents of the building seemed so strange, and the innumerable beer bars so different to anything we had seen for years, that we were at first vastly amused.

The defects of the camp, and particularly of our dormitory, soon made themselves apparent. We had already had some experience of "double-deck" beds in various camps and had found them to be very unpleasant. The lower berth was probably the most comfortable, but the upper berth had more air and in a room where eighty were sleeping at the same time the lack of air was very noticeable. To make matters worse the windows were all permanently shut and bolted. Our demand to have these windows opened was met by an unqualified refusal, causing endless trouble between us and the authorities.

For the first few weeks we were not allowed to use the so-called billiard-room, which immediately after our arrival was handed over to the guards, about thirty of whom lived in the building. The two very small rooms at the top of the house were occupied by two or three of the senior officers, and as a result there were only two rooms which the majority of us could use: the theatre in which we slept, and the dining-room on the ground floor. We were only

allowed into the exercise yard at certain stated times of the day, and as it was winter when we arrived at Neunkirchen we could not make much use of even this small space.

The lavatory and washing accommodation was totally insufficient. At first there was only one cold shower bath available in a small cellar beneath our dormitory. Eventually two baths with hot water apparatus were also installed, but even these were inadequate.

It was some time before our food parcels started to follow us on from Ströhen, and a small canteen, established at one end of the dining-room, was quite incapable of supplying our demands. As if purposely to annoy us the Germans issued a series of aggravating regulations which, while serving no useful purpose, made us even more uncomfortable. We were not allowed, for instance, to smoke in our dormitory at any hour of the day or night ; we were only permitted to cook and eat our meals at certain hours, and all lights had to be out by nine o'clock.

During the first few days we were continually being assembled, either in the building or in the yard for some notice to be read out by the German officers or the camp commandant. On these occasions we were kept standing for as much as half an hour on end for no apparent reason and the only thing which in any way relieved the tedium of this procedure was the stupidity of the camp interpreter. This man, a fat little Jew from Berlin, was in mortal fear of being sent to the front and had wormed his way into the position of interpreter as a last desperate effort to save his skin.

One thing is certain ; he knew no English other than what we chose to teach him, and, as soon as we had found this out, we proceeded to fill him up with a series of the most ridiculous and meaningless phrases we could think of. Some of the notices posted on the walls of the camp, for which he was responsible, were too ludicrous for words besides being quite unintelligible. One of these notices referred to the commander of the guard, whose official title was : "*Kommandant der Landsturm*." Our amazing interpreter rendered this phrase as "Commander of the Storms on Land." Whenever the general commanding the district came to inspect us, which later on was about twice a week, the unfortunate interpreter was reduced to a state of abject terror and used to beg those of us who knew any German to take his place and translate the general's speech—an invariable accompaniment to each of his visits. But to these entreaties we turned a deaf ear, being unwilling to miss the wonderful entertainment thus provided.

As soon as we had thoroughly grasped all the complicated regulations and the absurd conditions under which we were expected to live, we started to protest, at first politely and verbally and then more firmly, and in writing. This brought us our first visit from the general. He made a long speech, of which the majority of the prisoners understood nothing and which the interpreter was unable to explain. After one or two rude and very German remarks about the victorious German army and the approaching defeat of the Allies, he tried to be very pleasant and answered most of our objections in a satisfactory manner. He quite realized,

he said, that the yard was too small for us to be able to obtain sufficient exercise, but the usual bi-weekly walks on parole were soon to be started, and he was obtaining permission for us to make use of a football ground on the outskirts of the town. He also gave permission for the windows on the ground floor to be opened, but the upper row of windows opening from the gallery he insisted on keeping closed to prevent our communicating with the local inhabitants in the houses opposite.

Weeks passed by, however, and nothing further happened as far as the promised walks and the football ground were concerned. Another protest was written, bringing the general back very angry for what he termed our impudence, and rather apologetic for not having kept his word. He explained that the population was so hostile that he dared not let us out into the streets. Our answer, that not only did this not appear to be the case, but that the strong guard which had usually accompanied us on similar walks in other camps would provide ample protection, was not listened to ; it took us many weeks of continual complaining before our requests were granted.

Our parcels gradually began to arrive in reasonable quantities and, with the help of watery beer and bad wine sold in the canteen, we were able to furnish ourselves with quite a respectable Christmas dinner. After Christmas—my third in captivity—many of us began to cast around for ways and means of escaping. All the usual schemes were discussed ; but, owing to the smallness of the camp and the abnormal number of Germans living in the same building and continually

mixing with us, there was not much scope for putting them into practice. In fact, in a very short time we realized that although the Germans in this camp were quite inexperienced it was undoubtedly a difficult camp to escape from. A tunnel was, of course, among the earliest of the schemes suggested, and it was obvious that while waiting for other chances to occur to us we might just as well be digging our way out. Among the eighty prisoners a large proportion had tried to escape before, and we were sure of finding plenty of people to do the work. In addition to Collier and myself, there were Wilkin, late of Fort Zorndorf, renowned as a picker of locks and an excellent all-round mechanic ; Major McClean, Gordon Highlanders, who had already escaped from two camps ; Blaine, who had nearly crossed the frontier on his first attempt, and a dozen others of the same type.

At first sight, there seemed to be plenty of places in the camp suitable for starting a tunnel. To begin with there were all the board covered bars, the majority of which had already been adapted to serve as excellent hiding-places for our kit. Beneath any of these it would be quite practicable, as far as the ground floor was concerned, to start a tunnel and there would be plenty of room for stowing away the earth. The exercise yard was also very tempting, as the distance required to reach the outside of the camp was extremely short. For instance, if we had been able to sink a shaft at one end of the bowling alley, we should only have had to dig under a brick wall in order to gain access to what the Germans told us was a disused gymnasium, from which we had reason to believe there was an

exit leading into the street. But we were forced to give up the idea as there were two German sentries on permanent duty in the tiny yard and, moreover, we could never tell whether we were not being observed from the windows of the main building.

It was decided that the best place of all would be behind and underneath the stage, if only we could manage to gain access to it. Why on earth the Germans had ever thought of boarding up the stage, I cannot imagine. Not only would there have been more room for the prisoners if they had left it unboarded, but also they could easily have seen everything that was going on, and, in addition, we should have had none of the incentive which invariably prompts one to investigate the mystery of a locked door.

There were four doors leading to these mysterious regions behind the boarded up stage. Two of these were on the ground floor, only a few feet from the nearest beds which completely screened them from view, the other two at either end of the gallery. All four of these doors opened inwards, that is towards the back of the stage, and, although Wilkin made short work of the locks, we soon found that there must be some obstruction on the far side, as three of these doors would not give an inch. The fourth door opened easily but we did not feel safe in using it, the Germans having decided to store the prisoners' luggage on the stage and this being the door through which they passed two or three times a week. It would be easy for Wilkin to cut a panel out of one of the other doors with his kit of tools, but meanwhile we found another entrance.

One day, when we had been up to have a talk with McClean who lived in one of the small rooms reserved for the senior officers, Wilkin thought it would be a good idea to examine a small door leading apparently out on to the roof from the top floor landing. After very little trouble with the lock Wilkin forced the door open and we found that it led into a large passage running the whole length of the eaves under the roof.

Closing the door behind us we crept along to the far end, where we discovered a rickety wooden staircase leading down into the wings of the stage. The place had evidently been disused for years and was covered with cobwebs. The staircase ended half-way down and we had to complete our journey to the stage itself by sliding down the tattered remains of an old drop curtain. Picking our way through the pile of trunks and suit-cases belonging to the prisoners, we reached the side of the stage and found a short staircase bringing us down to the ground level. To our great joy we noticed that we were now standing on bare earth, unprotected by concrete or even boards. But although we were now close to the end wall of the building, and therefore on the very edge of the camp, we considered it out of the question to start digging there since any German who came in to attend to the prisoners' luggage would see the results of our labours.

We prowled about in the dark and eventually discovered a little trap-door which we had no difficulty in forcing open. Creeping through it we found ourselves beneath the stage itself. Here again the floor was bare earth and it was quite evident, from the cob-

webs which brushed our faces and from the lack of any articles connected either with the prisoners or the German authorities, that it had been a long time since anyone had pushed his way into this dark corner. We were not very far from the outside wall and there was plenty of space beneath the stage to stow all the earth from the tunnel.

Before actually beginning to dig we had to make sure of a quick and easy way in and out of the part of the building behind the stage. The passage under the roof was very good in some ways, but it meant using the main staircase a great deal, and this staircase, starting outside the dormitory, passed immediately in front of the door of the guard-room, which was generally open. Climbing down behind the stage was also a very noisy business, and it seemed essential therefore to open one of the doors leading from the gallery into the wings. The gallery contained tables and chairs and was used as a reading and writing room, so there was nothing suspicious in two or three prisoners seen loitering there. The backs of the doors had been boarded up, but an hour's work was sufficient to loosen a panel in one of them so that it was easily removable and yet when in place showed no sign of having been tampered with.

A few days later, having provided ourselves with the usual table knives and several suits of old clothes for digging purposes, work was commenced and a shaft was rapidly sunk beneath a corner of the front of the stage. Starting at this exact point would enable us to dig a short second tunnel beneath the floor of the theatre itself so as to have direct access to the



tunnel from the floor of our dormitory, enabling us to do without the gallery door.

Unfortunately an immense amount of rain fell during the month of January and, as the drains were not sufficient to take away the water collected round the camp, most of it collected at the bottom of our shaft. The tunnel mouth which had just been commenced at a depth of six feet below the ground level was soon under water and we had to stop work and resort to baling. A few days of fine weather and much hard labour allowed us to get ahead of the infiltration and, as soon as the bottom of the shaft was uncovered, we proceeded to deepen it to about ten feet. There was thus a distance of some four feet from the lower lip of the tunnel mouth to the bottom of the shaft. This was boarded over to form a platform upon which the workers could stand. A hole was left in this platform, sufficiently large to allow buckets, lowered from the top of the shaft, to pass through and collect the water accumulated in the sump. The ground beneath the stage sloped down quite sharply towards the corner opposite that in which our shaft was sunk and we were able to empty the buckets outside the shaft with a certainty that the water would run away.

Digging in the tunnel was resumed, but we now found that the number of workers so far admitted into the "gang" were not sufficient to carry on the digging and cope with the drainage problem as well. Fresh workers were recruited from among the other members of the camp, and as time went on almost every able-bodied man who considered that he had a chance of escape and was willing to try was brought

into the scheme. At one time there were thus about fifty prisoners employed on some job or other connected with the tunnel.

After a few yards of the tunnel had been dug and the entrance of the shaft reinforced and revetted with wooden props obtained largely from old boards found under the stage, we started work on the auxiliary tunnel which was to pass beneath the front of the stage and come up through the dormitory floor. In spite of the fact that a great many large stones had been used in the foundations of the stage, work in this direction was fairly easy as the cement was soft and the soil loosely packed. After ten days' work we reached a point estimated to be about two feet in front of the stage, and we then drove a shaft vertically to the surface. The last part was most unpleasant work, since the whole floor beneath the boards of the theatre was covered with six inches of clinker and ashes. One or two of the workers were almost blinded on first striking this layer, but, with the help of spectacles fitted with a protecting edge of blanket material, the work was soon completed.

The next and most difficult part of this branch tunnel was the cutting of a trap-door in the floor of our dormitory. We had imagined that this would be perfectly simple and would merely consist in cutting a piece about two feet square out of the boards, but if this had been done it would have been noticed at once. To make sure of it being invisible we were forced to cut through the dovetailing, joining the planks together, for the whole way around the proposed trap-door. The planks were hard, well-seasoned wood,

fitting very closely together, and only the finest of razor-blade saws could be used to prevent the saw marks being left along the upper edges of the planks. Even so the trap could not be cut square, for in a well-made floor the ends of all the planks are not in line, but only every third or fourth. This compelled us to cut out a very irregular section of the floor, and consequently the space to be allowed for a man coming through had to be considerably increased. It was also necessary to cut through two heavy supporting beams to which the planks were nailed and, to prevent the now weakened floor from giving way, the ends of these beams had to be supported by large blocks of stone taken from beneath the stage.

Wilkin very cleverly devised a complicated but successful system of fastenings, allowing the trap to move perfectly freely and at the same time ensuring that the hinges were invisible from above. A spring catch was fitted to each separate plank, which effectively secured the whole framework and prevented the planks from giving way if anyone stepped on them. These catches were all connected to a rod, from which a wire ran for several yards under the floor to a corner of the dormitory where it was hooked to the wall. A small, unnoticeable hole at the edge of the boards permitted one to reach the wire which, on being pulled, released the safety catches and the end of the trap-door was then pushed up by a strong spring. The whole arrangement—due almost entirely to Wilkin—was most ingenious, and when the trap was shut from the outside there was positively nothing to be seen.

The gallery door was now abandoned in favour of

the new entrance. Later on, when the water in the shaft had subsided, we intended to close up the top of the shaft and fill it with earth, leaving no trace of digging in the space beneath the stage. Meanwhile, although considerable progress had been made with the main tunnel, the incessant rain had nearly filled up the shaft once again. It was extraordinary to see how quickly the shaft filled and many gallons must have been emptied into the far corner beneath the stage without making any noticeable impression. Eventually the ground where we emptied the water became water-logged and failed to soak up more than a small quantity of the huge amount we threw away.

Some other means had to be found of draining the shaft and, casting around for something that might help us, we came across an old iron cauldron among the rubbish at the back of the stage. We placed this cauldron close to the top of the shaft and emptied our buckets into it. A rubber tube was led from the cauldron, through the boards of the stage, over the footlights into the dormitory. The floor of the dormitory was on a lower level than the ground beneath the stage and consequently the water automatically siphoned from the cauldron into various buckets and basins outside. These again were emptied down the sink of one of the disused bars. If no Germans approached, the process was continued until all the water from the shaft had been got rid of. This system worked remarkably well, although it was naturally risky.

We had arranged a series of signals, consisting of taps with a hammer on the front of the stage, to serve

as a warning to those digging when anyone approached. On one or two occasions we fancied that the Germans had noticed these sounds and we had to devise something new. Wilkin was again invaluable, and, with the help of an electric torch battery purchased from the German barber for a loaf of white bread and two eggs, he constructed an electric buzzer. This instrument gave the alarm or "all clear" signal to the workers but was quite inaudible in the theatre. The wire was carried up into the gallery where an accomplice sat all day apparently reading a book, ready to press the button in case of necessity.

When the tunnel was fifteen yards long we began to have the usual trouble with the ventilation, but by widening the entrance and the first few yards, and using electric torches—supplied by the barber—instead of candles, we were able to improve matters considerably. A short period of frost and snow permitted some really rapid progress to be made and, from the only window overlooking the point aimed at, we took sights and calculated how far we had yet to go.

Outside the building on this side of the camp there was a path for the sentries not more than six feet in width. For half its length this path was bounded by a brick wall fifteen feet high, surrounding the civil prison. For the remainder of its length, it was separated by a wall eight feet high from a series of small allotments belonging to a row of houses, the backs of which could be seen from our window. A lane one hundred yards distant passed between two of these houses and led to the centre of the town. To bring

us to a point where we felt we should be safe in coming to the surface required a total tunnel length of about twenty-four yards, and as we gradually approached this point we thought it was now time to start to brush up our escaping kit and organize for the final exodus.

There were now so many prisoners engaged in completing the tunnel that it became obvious there would not be enough compasses and maps to go round. A number of prisoners were therefore grouped into a firm of escape outfitters comprising many branches. McClean opened a compass factory in his upstairs room. His compasses, although rather rough in appearance, were thoroughly reliable, being made for the most part out of magnetized needles supported on the jewelled bearings taken from watches, and enclosed either in a small wooden box or else actually in watch case with dummy face and hands. He did not take long to make each one, and I believe he manufactured more than a score of them. One or two prisoners, able to use needle and thread, volunteered to make civilian clothes out of old uniforms and blankets.

Blaine and I set up a passport department. I had several samples of home-made passes to go by and I remembered the details of many similar papers made out by prisoners at Zorndorf. Three or four nights running we broke into the German canteen in our dining-room after the Germans had gone for the night, and secured their typewriter. The machine was rushed down to the dormitory and a dozen different styles of passes and permits to travel were hurriedly thumped out. Later on a young Canadian, named

Dodwell, made us some really beautiful passes, imitating printed Gothic characters with the skill of an expert. A photographer was allowed to visit the camp and we had our pictures taken in old uniforms, taking care that no badges showed. Cut to a suitable size and pasted on the pass these photographs were most effective.

The greater part of the prisoners, of course, could not speak a word of German and consequently would be forced to travel by night and on foot, avoiding all towns and villages. It was just possible that they might manage to board a train, in which case the passes would probably come in handy, and it was more or less certain that, however cautious they were, some of them would meet and perhaps be questioned by Germans. On such an occasion a word or two of German, spoken with a reasonably good accent and without nervousness, was very often all that was needed to allay suspicion and get one out of a tight corner. At the request of several prisoners, we therefore made out a typewritten list of the more common German expressions and forms of greeting, questions likely to be asked and the answers to be given. We also explained the pronunciation of the various phrases and tested the ability of those who had learnt a certain amount.

We made a list of all those intending to use the tunnel and found out their requirements. There had not been much escaping kit in the camp until we had started making it and several prisoners had to be furnished with a complete equipment. This consisted of a compass, a forged pass, a rough suit which would pass muster in the dark, and the list of German phrases.

of aff. VIII/a

Bescheinigung.

Hierdurch wird bescheinigt, dass . . . *Fritz Golyman* . . . .  
geboren Stettin, den . 6. *August, 1894*: uns wohlbekannt ist und  
die Erlaubnis sich auswärts zu beschäftigen von uns empfangen hat  
. . . . *Fritz Golyman* . . . ist vom militärdienst befreit,  
laut Vorschrift des Kriegsministeriums vom 25en Juli, 1917,  
56/ § 12/ a. 5/.

(Unterschrift.) Fritz Holzmann . . .



...  
Bureau-President und Polizei-  
Leutnant.

Prædikt i skoleen.

ELEMENTARY FORM OF FORGED PASS, MADE AT NEUNKIRCHEN IN 1918.



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We were also short of maps, but we had some fairly good copies and certain sections of the Swiss and Dutch frontiers. We filled in the gaps fairly successfully with the help of a map taken from a railway time-table. Those who wanted maps were lent the originals and traced their own copies.

All those who were going to make the attempt were naturally anxious to know in what order they were to go out and at what time of night or day they were to be ready. Long before the tunnel approached completion we made out a list allotting a place and the probable time of exit for each prisoner. The first twelve places were reserved for those of us who had either escaped before or had originated the scheme. After these, there was a second batch of about fifteen who had taken an active part in the digging of the tunnel; a third party, consisting of those who had helped indirectly, was some twenty strong.

The first prisoners on the list would leave at about nine o'clock in the evening, which meant that if all went well the last prisoner would be clear of the tunnel mouth, allowing for safe intervals between each party, by about one o'clock in the morning. This gave even the last prisoner ample time to get clear of the town and into cover before daylight. Blaine and I, who were among the first, hoped to catch a train at 9.30 from Neunkirchen which, with two changes, would bring us to Düsseldorf or Crefeld in the afternoon of the following day. We were then to make straight for the frontier and Blaine, who knew the district well, thought that we should be able to cross the Dutch frontier the same night.

At last, in spite of the troublesome drainage operations which we had frequently been forced to suspend to avoid attracting German attention, the tunnel reached a point where we could safely break surface, and at this moment, as in the case of so many tunnel schemes, Fate stepped in and swept away the whole of our deep laid plans. By a stroke of ill-luck a few days before the completion of the tunnel, the commandant of the camp was removed. We had little cause to like him and, when we found that the new commandant was a thoroughly good sportsman who intended to do the best he possibly could for us, we thought we had benefited by the change. But one of the first things he did was to have a thorough inspection of the camp with the idea of seeing how he could improve our quarters and remedy the inefficient sanitation and drainage. While this close inspection went on we stopped all work on the tunnel, but on the second day the commandant decided to have a look behind the stage doors. When first the Germans went in we had no fear of anything being discovered, as we knew that they had never looked beneath the stage before and the little door leading in had been securely fastened after the construction of the dormitory trap-door. But the commandant was inquisitive and, finding that the ground on either side of the stage was unpleasantly damp, he had the small door forced open and a man sent in to inspect the ground in the centre. When half an hour later the commandant and two Germans came out into the dormitory we knew at once that we had failed once again. I felt peculiarly foolish ; it was the sixth unsuccessful tunnel in which I had taken part.

# Personal-Ausweis.

Nr.

122 W. a. 17. 5/87

gültig vom

bis zum

Die Polizeiverwaltung der Stadt Aachen bescheinigt hierdurch dass nachstehende Photographie mit dem folgenden *Portrait* *identisch* ist.

Name

*Ant. Jentzsch*

Geboren am

*3. März 1897*

Beruf

*Arbeitslos*

Besondere Kennzeichen

*keine*

Eigenhändige Unterschrift

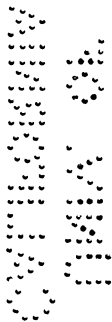
*Jentzsch*

Unterschrift des Beamten

Aachen den



FINISHED SPECIMEN OF FORGED PASS, 1918



The guard was called out; sentries with fixed bayonets were posted at every conceivable angle of the stage and the dormitory, and a squad of Germans armed with spades and pickaxes were sent in to demolish the tunnel, and to secure any evidence they could find against individual prisoners. They discovered the trap-door, the working of which puzzled them completely. They were unable to find the means of releasing the safety catches and after much hammering and scratching they were eventually forced to break the floor in with sledge-hammers. The commandant himself was not particularly upset, but the entire German staff and the guards were almost frantic, and there was a terrible to-do in the *Kommandantur* where each prisoner was sent for separately and cross-examined as to his share in the proceedings. A deep cut on my hand caused a lot of suspicion to fall upon me, but fortunately I was not arrested.

The inevitable result of the discovery of the tunnel was a visit from the general. He arrived, purple in the face, the same afternoon and the prisoners were assembled in the yard to receive him. We were quite prepared for a speech, but we were not expecting the amazing harangue which he and the interpreter gave us. In tones of deep emotion the general said something like this:

"*Meine Herren*, I am grieved to hear that an attempt to escape has been made. After all I have done for you; after I had permitted you to have air in your bedroom at night; this is the way you reward me. I shall take steps to have you punished."

He then mumbled to the interpreter, who was also

trembling with emotion, but from a different cause, to carry on with the translation, and this is what the interpreter said :

“ Gentlemen, this morning in your camp an underground outgoing is found ! ”

There was a burst of laughter at this, whereupon the general mumbled something more to the interpreter, who went on :

“ The General is not satisfied with you already ; he is quite angry, and why not ? ”

Again we roared with laughter and again the general mumbled something. This time the interpreter was quite unable to deal with the situation, but, doubtless feeling that he had to say something or else lose his post, he emitted a series of grunts and faint squeaks. He was greeted with loud cheers. The entertainment went on for nearly twenty minutes during which time the general delivered himself of a most impassioned oration reducing us all to a state of helpless giggling. When he had quite finished, the general gravely saluted us, a gesture which the interpreter imitated, and surrounding himself with a party of guards dashed out of the camp. We just had time to run upstairs to our dining-room and from the two windows overlooking the front of the camp we gave the unfortunate man one more hearty cheer as he drove off in a ramshackle little two-seater car. The comic side of the general's visit made us almost forget the tragedy of the tunnel and at the end of the day we felt quite ready to start again.

## CHAPTER XXIII

A FEEBLE attempt at a search was carried out a few days later, but little or nothing was found by the Germans. In spite of its failure therefore we could say that the tunnel had succeeded in forcing us to prepare and had made us keen to devise fresh plans.

As far as Neunkirchen was concerned it was obvious that we should never again have such a chance of getting so many prisoners out together. The regulations were now stricter than ever. There were extra sentries in the yard ; an extra *Appell* was held in the evening, and a number of German N.C.O.'s and soldiers were told off to play the rôle of comic detectives. We were continually finding means of fooling these men and setting booby traps for them. One night after lights out a few of us were still sitting up smoking and drinking beer, when we noticed a man peering over the edge of the gallery. We tiptoed to the side of our dormitory and unhooked the fire hose. When next his head appeared we let fly, not only with the hose but with boots and any other hard object ready to hand. There was a muffled gasp, and then a patter of stockinged feet as the amateur detective rushed down the back stairs and took refuge in the guard-room.

At about this time air raids started again on



manufacturing towns in the Saar basin. It was to prevent these that camps had been established at Neunkirchen, Saarbrücken and one or two other points. We were naturally very excited and all kinds of wild projects were discussed, to be put into operation if only the town and the walls of the camp were knocked flat by a salvo of bombs. The first raid we saw gave us all kinds of new ideas. Although the bombing aeroplanes were miles away in the direction of Saarbrücken, we could see the searchlights and bursting anti-aircraft shells. The moment the alarm was given we were all locked up in the dining-room, while the Germans took refuge in the cellars. All the lights in the town as well as those in the camp were put out and we began to think that with a few more raids we might be able to stage a successful escape.

Meanwhile we believed we could possibly be of some use to the Allied airmen, if they came over Neunkirchen, by showing them the position of our camp—its bearing in relation to the rest of the town being known to our Intelligence Service. Wilkin was consulted once again and was asked if he could install a signalling apparatus in the roof. As just before the failure of the tunnel he had succeeded in constructing a small but quite efficient telephone set to be used between the tunnel and the dormitory, this new task was comparatively easy. There was only gas installed in the camp and he had to rely entirely on the primitive electrical apparatus obtained from the German barber. With his usual ingenuity Wilkin soon overcame all difficulties and, as far as I remember, a lamp was fitted in the roof above McClean's

room, and connected to a Morse tapping key in the dining-room below.

Not content with this, Wilkin went on with his experiments with the object not only of providing the camp with a complete telephone service, but also of setting up a wireless installation capable of communicating with the nearest Allied post some ninety miles distant. He had got far towards achieving this remarkable plan, and was only waiting for some of the essential material to be smuggled out from England, when we left the camp a month or so later.

In addition to these varied employments Wilkin was kept continually busy picking locks in different parts of the camp, partly with a view to finding some new places which might afford opportunities of escape and also to discover suitable hiding-places for the large amount of kit now at our disposal. Really sure methods of breaking out of camp were practically non-existent, although it seemed within the bounds of possibility to play the old washing-basket trick successfully. For weeks we tried to devise some scheme for bluffing our way out of the main gate, disguised either as German soldiers or civilians. At one time we even thought of disguising ourselves as the general and his staff and walking boldly out at the end of one of his frequent visits. As well as being decidedly humorous this scheme would have enabled us to make a quick get-away in the general's motor-car, but as it involved the temporary kidnapping of the general by the prisoners remaining behind, it was naturally difficult to find accomplices who were willing to lend a hand.

Some of the prisoners thought that the town prison adjoining the camp would be easier to escape from than the camp itself, and in this connection a rather amusing incident occurred at about this time. One morning at *Appell* the interpreter called out my name. He knew none of us by sight or by name, although it was his business to do so, and in a spirit of mischief Collier presented himself in my place. The interpreter informed him that the authorities at Ströhen had announced that I still had fourteen days of my sentence to serve. Personally I was sick to death of solitary confinement, but Collier seemed to be quite anxious to spend two weeks in the jail to investigate its possibilities and also to pass a few quiet nights "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife." I agreed to his taking my place, the Germans were none the wiser, and Collier was duly transferred to prison under my name. He stayed there for about a week, during which time he read a lot of very interesting books and found that escape was out of the question. Then one of the German officers came back from leave and found me in the camp. He was astounded and said that he thought I was supposed to be in prison. I gave some rather lame excuse which did not satisfy him, and, Collier having confessed to his real name, he was brought out of prison and I was put in in his place. After a fortnight I returned to the camp, agreeing with Collier that escape from the jail—at any rate from the cell in which we had both been placed—was impossible.

We were now reluctantly forced to admit that failing a relaxation of the strict supervision maintained

by the authorities, the best we could hope for was a transfer to another camp, which, rumour had it, would take place in the spring. Meanwhile we were able to improve our physical condition. The promised walks had at last started and, to our great joy, permission to use the football ground just outside the town was granted. There were just enough rugby players in the camp to make up two fifteens, and we had some very amusing games which did us all a great deal of good. The general's story about hostility of the inhabitants was complete nonsense; most of the inhabitants took no notice of us at all, and those few who did were extremely friendly.

At the beginning of March several of the older prisoners were told that their turn for exchange to Holland was drawing near. Most of them, being old prisoners of the retreat from Mons, were naturally very pleased at the prospect, but one or two who were keen on escaping wondered whether they had better not refuse to go. The conditions of the exchange were certainly very tempting, for within the limits of certain towns ex-prisoners were allowed to live in complete freedom and to do exactly as they pleased. The English prisoners were centred in The Hague; the German prisoners from England in Rotterdam or some other town. The great disadvantage lay in the fact that, by the terms of the agreement between England, Holland, and Germany, prisoners once in Holland would stay there until the end of the war, being expressly forbidden by their respective governments to make any attempt to escape. Some of the prisoners felt that they ought not to make this final

and irrevocable surrender and that by staying in Germany they were at least preventing a certain number of Germans from taking an active part in the war. It was, however, obviously impossible for all of us to escape and after several years of imprisonment many began to despair of ever succeeding.

A farewell banquet was arranged as a send-off to the first party from Neunkirchen, and shortly afterwards the names of the second batch were announced. McClean found himself among these and made up his mind not to go. He informed the Germans of his decision, but he was told that his name being on the official list he would have to go as far as Aachen, the camp to which prisoners were taken on their way to Holland, in order to satisfy the authorities of his definite refusal. He still determined to escape some day and it was just possible that at Aachen he would find a chance. On leaving McClean took with him an excellent assortment of escaping necessities and we watched his departure with interest, hoping that the next time a party left for Aachen one of us might be smuggled out in a large wicker basket such as some of the prisoners used for packing their belongings.

Three days later, like the dove to Mount Ararat, McClean returned to Neunkirchen. He reported that escape from the camp did not seem to be very difficult but that it would require time to work out the details. Owing to his having been sent back a day sooner than he had expected, he had been unable to accomplish his purpose, but he was able to give us a rough plan of the camp together with its exact position on the south-

west side of the town of Aachen. He also brought us news of one or two other prisoners who had likewise refused to be exchanged to Holland.

A week or two elapsed and then the Germans published yet another list of prisoners who were to be prepared to leave for Aachen at a moment's notice. This time the list included Collier, Wilkin and myself. Collier was inclined to accept, but Wilkin and I were firm in our belief that we still stood a reasonable chance of escaping successfully and consequently refused. Thinking that the authorities would have benefited by McClean's case, we imagined that we should not be sent even as far as Aachen and put the matter completely out of our minds. Rumours that we were soon to be transferred to another camp were becoming more frequent, and to hasten this move we continued making a series of written protests to the Germans, dealing chiefly with the unhealthiness of the camp. I also put in my usual application to be allowed to rejoin my brother. I felt so certain I would not be sent to Aachen that I even wrote home asking for more escaping kit to be sent out, and for all parcels to be sent to Holzminden, my brother's camp.

One morning, to our surprise, the Germans announced that the authorities in Berlin had decided we must go as far as Aachen, so that there should be absolutely no doubt of our refusal to go to Holland. They were apparently worried lest they should be accused by the Allied governments of keeping prisoners back. This decision put the whole matter

of escaping on a totally different footing and we accordingly revised our plans.

I was not to leave Neunkirchen, however, without once more getting into trouble with the authorities. A fortnight before our departure we were examined by a German doctor who had to certify that all prisoners were free from disease before entering Holland. The examination took a very long time and we were ordered to strip completely naked in front of the most unpleasant specimen of the German medical profession it has ever been my misfortune to set eyes on. I informed the doctor that as I was not going to Holland the examination was quite unnecessary in my case, and that I did not intend to strip. After a short argument he lost his temper, sent for some guards and had me arrested. The commandant, while expressing much sympathy, was forced to award me seven days in jail. This time instead of being sent out of the camp to the prison, I was locked in one of the empty rooms at the top of the house. I spent a pleasant week there, putting the finishing touches to a forged passport and practising picking and unpicking the lock of my room with a bent fork. Every evening, having picked the lock, I went downstairs, had a glass of beer and listened to the camp gossip. By ten o'clock when the Germans went on their rounds, I was upstairs again and had relocked my door for the night.

A week after my release the time came for our departure. We had arranged to take a large stock of escaping kit so that, should we be unable to escape from Aachen and not be sent back to Neunkirchen,

we would be fully equipped in the next camp. It was by no means easy to hide so many things, and the news that we were to undergo a strict search before leaving the camp gave us cause for anxiety. On entering the *Kommandantur*, we found that our fears were justified when we were told to take off the greater part of our clothing and unpack our luggage. Wilkin and I made some excuse and hurried back to the dormitory where we got rid of the bulkier and least necessary of our possessions. After that the search passed off satisfactorily and nothing was found. I had with me a compass, a map of Aachen and the Dutch frontier, two or three hundred marks of German money, a forged permit to travel, and a moderately good felt hat sewn into the lining of my coat in such a way as to be practically unnoticeable unless the coat was ripped open. Fortunately we were not completely stripped as the pass and some of the money were in a canvas belt tied tightly around my waist.

We got into the train at Neunkirchen at nine o'clock in the morning and, travelling all day long through the picturesque Rhineland, reached Cologne without incident at about eleven that night. We had to change trains here, and there was a wait of over an hour. Here again we were taken into the underground waiting-room where we found numerous other prisoners from different camps also on their way to Aachen. High up on the whitewashed wall of this temporary prison, I found my name with the date "December 8th, 1915!" Beneath it I added "April 16th, 1918." Nearly two years and a half—perhaps I had a pre-



monition of victory, but somehow those dates seemed to look like the beginning and the end.

The train for Aachen arrived just after midnight and our party, now nearly a hundred strong, was soon packed in. Wilkin and I had entertained high hopes of leaving the train before we reached our destination. But, notwithstanding a dark night and a scarcity of guards, the train maintained far too high a speed for any attempt to be made with safety.

## CHAPTER XXIV

**W**E reached Aachen at half-past one in the morning, and marched through the dark deserted streets towards the east side of the town. It was quite clear that we were not going to the camp described by McClean, and our hopes fell. Both Wilkin and I talked over the possibility of bolting down a side street during the march, but the guards were numerous enough to be able to give chase without weakening the main body, and we were also quite ignorant of the topography of the town.

Upon arriving at the camp we were all interviewed by the authorities, and particulars were taken down and compared with a list supplied from Berlin. When my turn came I told them of my determination to stop in Germany and not to be exchanged; Wilkin did the same. The Germans were much amused, as they fancied we preferred the delightful prison life we had been leading to the freedom of Holland. But they told us we should have to stay another night in Aachen before they could get permission from Berlin to send us back.

This only gave us the next day to decide on a plan of escape, and the next night to carry it out. It was difficult to believe that we should be able to find a sure method, but we began to investigate the camp at once. We were not allowed out of the building

till the morning, and we had to content ourselves with making a rough survey from the inside before we went to bed.

We found that the place we were in was only one half of the whole building ; the other half being used as a hospital for German wounded. There was apparently no communication between the two halves, for we could see several bricked-up doorways on the first and second floors. Moreover, when we had been brought in, we had come through the main entrance of the German hospital out into the courtyard at the back, then through a gateway into another yard, and finally by a side door into our own part of the building. One side of the camp was bounded by a main road, and the remaining two sides by the usual wooden palisade and barbed-wire, enclosing a small exercise yard. The hospital section possessed a similar yard for the use of the German wounded, and was surrounded by a tall barbed-wire fence. The two yards were separated by a wall, in which was the gateway we had recently passed through, and by an iron-roofed brick shed. Next day we discovered that this shed contained the camp lavatories, both for the prisoners and the hospital inmates.

From the top floor we counted the sentries and estimated how large an area the arc-lamps illuminated. We could see that the camp was well defended, particularly owing to the proximity of the hospital and the houses in the street. We were actually inside the town but near the outskirts, and there were fields in front of the camp. In the distance, a few miles to the north we could dimly make out a line of hills

which we knew must overlook the Dutch frontier. The thought that we were so close made us doubly keen. I felt very excited and remember saying to Wilkin as we watched from the window :

" There, ahead of us, lies the frontier we have been trying to get a glimpse of since 1915. By hook or by crook we have *got* to get away to-morrow night ! "

Next morning several batches of prisoners due for exchange came in ; among them were Strong, my one-time observer, and Beverley Robinson, who had been at Holzminden since leaving Ströhen. Robinson had also refused the exchange to Holland, and hearing that Wilkin and I were doing likewise, offered his help if we attempted to escape. We gave him a rough idea of our plans and he asked if he might follow us if the scheme were successful. He had brought some sort of kit with him, including a compass and a felt hat, and we therefore agreed to his making a third.

The rest of the morning we spent in walking round the yard, examining the wire and the positions of the sentries, and searching for a safe way out. Our escape would have to be made without any preparation, owing to the short time at our disposal : it was useless to think of anything like bluffing our way out as German officers, or even workmen, for we had none of the necessary kit and no knowledge of the regular routine of the place. We had to make sure that we got away without being noticed, because once the alarm was raised it would be easy for the Germans, with the frontier only a few miles distant, to patrol every yard of the sector we were likely to cross. For

the same reason, since we were certain to be missed early the next morning, it was essential to cross the frontier the same night, and therefore an early start was necessary.

Scheme after scheme was suggested and thrown aside as impracticable, and we were driven to the conclusion that the only possible way out was to get somehow into the hospital yard, which was not so well guarded and less brilliantly illuminated. With only one barbed-wire fence to cross, it seemed probable that once there we should be able to get safely into the open. The problem was how to cross the wall. It was fairly well lighted and several sentries would be able to see it clearly. The lavatories on our side had no communication with those on the German side—at least if there had ever been a door, it was bricked up now. The gate in the wall was of no use; it was locked and there was a sentry on duty near it.

Almost in despair we made another inspection of the lavatories, and this time we noticed something that had previously escaped our attention. Twelve feet from the ground there were two ventilation holes, each less than two feet square, piercing the wall and evidently leading into the hospital lavatories. Both these holes were wired up, but in one of them the strands were loose and widely spread leaving enough space for us to squeeze through. The question as to what we should do on the other side was still unsettled, but at any rate we knew how to get there.

We went indoors and up to the top floor where we could watch the other yard, and notice how many

Germans were using their lavatories. We found that, while there was only one exit from our lavatories, there were three on the hospital side and one of them close to the wire. The wire fence was about six feet high and fairly closely woven, but we thought we could climb it in the dark. We could only see two sentries, one outside the wire and one in the yard. They were probably meant to guard against possible deserters from the hospital, but they might easily give us trouble as well. We learnt from prisoners who had arrived before us, that the yard was closed for the night at a quarter to ten and it was not dark till 9.15<sup>1</sup>—so there would not be much margin of time for our escape.

We worked out our scheme again in the afternoon, and made another careful survey of the camp to see if we could find anything better, but there seemed to be nothing else. We collected the small amount of kit we had, and decided what to wear and what to take in the way of food.

I had still with me a moderately good map, some money, a forged pass, a small compass and a felt hat. I was wearing grey flannel trousers, and my khaki coat had ordinary bone buttons and no badges of any sort, so that in the dark I might well pass for a workman. Wilkin was similarly equipped, and we managed to get him a felt hat from another prisoner who was going to Holland. Chocolate and a few biscuits were all we needed for provisions; we intended to breakfast across the frontier on the following morning.

<sup>1</sup> German summertime.

As soon as it began to get dark, we again posted ourselves at a window and watched the hospital yard. At first there seemed to be an awful crowd ; but gradually it thinned out, and by half-past nine there were only a few men left in the whole place. We got ready and went out. There were still many prisoners about and it was fortunate that it was so, for a sentry was already standing near the shed telling every one it was time to go into the main building.

As soon as we got to the shed, I went straight in while Wilkin watched the sentry from the doorway. The ventilation hole was almost in line with the doorway and could be seen from it, as the partition screening the toilet was only some seven feet high. At that moment the sentry put his head in at the door and said something about making haste. We replied with unintentional humour that we would be out in a minute, and the instant he had his back turned I slipped into one of the toilets. With the aid of a wooden partition and some water pipes I climbed up to a small cistern, and standing on it reached the hole, pulled up and pushed through. I let myself down on the far side and found the corresponding cistern with my feet. Looking back through the hole I saw that Robinson had followed me and was already climbing up, while Wilkin was still near the door watching the sentry, and—as he told me afterwards—the sentry was watching him. I waited a few seconds, but there was no time to be lost ; at any moment we might be discovered.

We let ourselves down cautiously from the cistern. On this side the lavatories were almost pitch dark,

and not meeting any Germans we tiptoed to the doorway and looked out; no one was in sight. A few paces forward we reached the fence. We made a hasty inspection of the wire; there was a small open drain running out at this point, and we found just enough room to crawl through. As we scrambled out I spotted the sentry in the German yard barely fifteen yards away, and even closer on the other side I could see one of the camp sentries; fortunately both had their backs turned. We crawled slowly for twenty yards, and then, getting into the shadow of a low hedge leading away from the camp, stood up and ran. A hundred yards farther on we reached another field with a taller hedge screening us completely from the sentries. Looking back I could see the window from which, only five minutes ago, we had been watching the Germans and discussing our chances. Except that Wilkin was not with us, everything was going well, and there were no signs of pursuit.

But we nearly had trouble within the next two minutes. We had crossed the field diagonally, making for a road on the far side. To get there we had to climb over a barbed-wire fence and pass close to a lamp-post standing in front of a row of houses. As luck would have it I caught my trousers on the fence, and in my haste to get unhooked tore a strip six inches long out of the seat. A party of two men, a woman and a boy, who were passing the lamp at this moment, glanced round, then stopped and stared at us. For a minute it looked as though they were going to come and question us, which would have been very awkward as Robinson could not speak German. But by talking

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loudly in German I made it seem that we were perfectly ordinary, though rather rough, young men on our way home.

"*Donnerwetter*," I said, "it is most annoying to tear one's trousers; but no matter, we shall soon be home now."

Robinson mumbled a bit, and said "*Ja wohl*" once or twice; the Germans stood still and did nothing. They were still staring when we turned the corner and disappeared from their gaze.

We passed between the houses and turned into a lane which we had just been able to see from the camp, and which appeared to lead clear of the town. For a quarter of an hour we followed this track, and then had again to dodge houses and factories. The country to the north-east of Aachen is thickly populated, and dotted with mines and blast-furnaces; in between the industrial patches it is hilly and wooded. To keep on a definite course by night with an inaccurate map was wellnigh impossible, and the difficulty of the situation was increased by the detours we were forced to make round all the numerous villages. At times we were scared by the glow from one of the furnaces, suddenly lighting up the whole countryside and giving us an unpleasant feeling of insecurity—as though we were being held in the beam of a searchlight.

For the first two hours we headed north-east, and then gradually turned until we were facing north. We came to better country and our pace increased, but we had wasted a lot of time getting clear of Aachen and its suburbs. Although it was a dark night and raining slightly, we soon noticed how clearly white



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houses or white posts showed up and wondered how much could be seen of us. Our faces were easy to cover up with our woollen mufflers, but we found that, through several bad tears in our trousers, our knees were showing and could be seen some way off; our hands were almost as bad. The only remedy seemed to be to rub earth on all the places that were noticeable, so we sat down in a corner of a ploughed field and plastered ourselves with mud. It was unpleasant and messy, but it rendered us almost invisible and we went on more confidently.

We got lost several times in a perfect maze of hills, rivers and woods, often made worse by the discovery of roads and railways not marked on our map. On these occasions we kept on a rough compass course, and the later it grew the straighter our course became, as there was less risk from villages and farms whose occupants had long since gone to bed. There seemed to be fewer dogs about than usual in Germany; we expected trouble with them as we came nearer to the frontier, but we had practically none. Our chief source of worry was the large number of small industrial settlements evidently constructed since the date of issue of our map. We were often forced to walk straight through such places and we were very fortunate in not meeting many people.

At half-past two we lost all confidence in the map, which after leading us to a correctly marked road suddenly brought us to a railway line, a brightly illuminated mine and then a river broad enough to make us look for a bridge. None of these features were shown on the map, and we wondered what we should

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do on the frontier. I began to lose confidence in our chances of success ; in fact, when we had made an almost complete circle round the mine and its neighbouring buildings and found ourselves heading due south, I was on the verge of despair. But within half an hour, the country flattened out and we came across several landmarks which, with some lights we could see to the north, convinced us that we were close to the small town of Kohlscheid, itself only two miles from the nearest point of the frontier.

We blundered into the southern outskirts, and were only saved from passing right through the place by discovering a main road with tramlines and seeing the station lights just ahead. Had we missed Kohlscheid we might easily have continued due north and run into the thickly populated and probably strongly guarded area of Kohlberg. Turning due west we found a stream and followed it to the main railway line from Aachen. We waited while a goods train passed slowly by and then crossed the line, picking up the stream on the far side. The lights of Kohlscheid station shone not five hundred yards to the right, and to our left a row of houses showed up faintly, indicating the position of the village of Bank.

From now on we were in the frontier zone and great caution was essential. Under normal circumstances it was an understood thing that one went dead slow in this zone, and for the last two miles it was considered best to crawl on hands and knees taking advantage of every scrap of cover. In our case this was out of the question ; it was already half-past three and we estimated that to reach the point where we

intended to cross the frontier, we had another four miles in front of us. Dawn would come between five and half-past and by that time we wanted to be more than a mile across the border; bearing in mind the uncertainty of its exact position, we had over five miles to do in less than two hours. Slow going was not to be thought of, and heading north-west we pushed on at a good three miles an hour.

Our route took us through open rolling country, with large ploughed fields, making concealment difficult but allowing us to see and avoid houses, villages and woods (which might contain guards) before getting dangerously near to them. We felt, too, that where we could not hide at any rate there was no chance of a sentry being concealed, and we made no noise in the open fields, whereas in a wood we should have been cracking twigs the whole time. Every now and then we stopped to listen for any sounds of voices or footsteps, and to take fresh bearings with the compass. Occasionally lying flat on the ground we scanned the dark grey skyline, hoping to see ahead of time any unusual movement that might betray the presence of a sentry. In this way we covered about two miles without any difficulty, and the only obstacles we encountered were the stream, which we recrossed, and a farmhouse. As we got nearer, we could see more lights some miles to the north, though whether this was another German village or actually one across the frontier we could not tell. One especially bright light shone out above the others and was very useful as a bearing-point. For a short time we headed towards these lights, but

we were brought to a full stop by another farmhouse from which a sound of voices was coming, and what seemed to be the clicking of rifle bolts. Then we fancied we could discern the figure of a sentry near the house, and hurriedly turning back we made a wide detour to the west and lost sight of the place without raising the alarm. By this time it was past 4.30 and it seemed almost certain that we were within two miles of the frontier.

There was not much time to spare. Our map was very vague as to the precise line of the frontier in this neighbourhood, but there was one certain indication of having crossed it: about a mile and a half across the border and parallel to it, there ran a line of railway. To be quite sure of success, we had to reach this line before dawn. And already the eastern horizon was giving a pale warning of the approach of day. Within an hour it would be light.

A mile past the farmhouse where we had heard voices, we reached a small patch of wood bounded by barbed-wire, and beyond it what appeared to be a much larger wood. We skirted the former, not trying to enter it as it was apparently crossed by several wire fences. On reaching the second wood, we found it to be composed of widely-spaced tall trees, with the undergrowth cut away and a high closely-woven barbed-wire fence running round it. This might be either part of the frontier defences or it might be merely farmers' wire. In any case it would be most unwise to attempt to get into the wood.

The side we had reached ran roughly east and west.

On the whole it seemed safer to follow it in the latter direction and after two or three hundred yards we came quite suddenly upon a road. It ran nearly north and south, and, from its size and good surface, we judged it to be the main road from Aachen to Holland. This gave us an excellent idea as to how far west we had come, but, owing to the lack of detail on our map, still no certain knowledge as to how far north. There was no one about ; the road was straight and, with its white surface, easy to see. A low hedge bounded it on either side. If we were challenged we could separate and hide in the woods. We were taking a big risk, but there was no time for hesitation, and we walked along it boldly for a few hundred yards. Then, as it turned and we could not see clearly around the bend, we took to a track on the left-hand side. The troublesome woods flanking the road had given way to a series of fields and orchards from which we again caught sight of some lights. They now bore roughly east-north-east, showing that we had made good progress to the north-west.

We strode on as fast as we could, for the sky was rapidly getting grey ; in less than half an hour it would be broad daylight. And then we almost tripped over a sentry ! He was sitting in a little rough shelter down in a hollow ; in front of him there was a fire in a bucket over which he was warming himself. I dimly perceived a *Landsturm* helmet on his head, and a rifle propped up beside him. Fortunately he gave no sign of having seen or heard us.

We retraced our steps on tiptoe for twenty yards, and then turned back towards the road. We reached



it and found it deserted, but having just seen a sentry the danger of following it seemed too great and we contented ourselves with going straight across so as to avoid a house only a few yards ahead. By the time we had crawled through a hedge on the far side and crossed a small field, it was light enough for us to be seen nearly half a mile away. With a sense of having failed, we realized we could go no farther that day, and began looking around anxiously for cover. The only possible hiding-place in sight was a small, sparse wood some four hundred yards farther north. We walked hard for it and, screened by a hedge, even ran the last hundred yards. We reached the trees and searched for a spot where we could if necessary lie up for the whole day. There was much wire and very little undergrowth; the best cover available was a blackberry bush. As we crawled in some men passed along an unseen road lying ahead of us and evidently joining up with the one we had just crossed. They were talking and I listened attentively, but I was unable to make out what they were saying though the words sounded distinctly German. For the present we could do nothing but keep quiet and watch for sentries.

Now that it was daylight we were able to go over our map more carefully, and followed mentally, step by step, the course we had taken during the night. Very gradually I became convinced that we had actually crossed the frontier and were already in Holland. This was a dangerously optimistic view to take and Robinson disagreed entirely. He was sure we were still in Germany, rightly arguing that we

had seen practically nothing of the frontier guards and that we had not yet reached the all-important railway. We talked it over for a long time, while Robinson produced a needle and thread and mended some of the worst tears in our clothing. For a short interval we took it in turns to sleep, and, during Robinson's watch he woke me up to point out two men in uniform going along the road. It was impossible to see at that distance whether they were Dutch or German since the two uniforms are very similar; yet they were going in the direction from which we had come and presently two more men came back. Supposing that they were sentries being relieved, this would seem to prove that the frontier was behind us.

Then a clock struck not very far from us. I counted six chimes, but by Robinson's watch it was now seven. Of course the clock might be wrong, but if not then the inference was obvious: the Germans had summer time, the Dutch had not—it was a Dutch clock. But a Dutch clock might well be heard in Germany. Were we a few yards inside Germany, or had we just crossed the border?

We were still anxious, but the evidence was turning in our favour, and Robinson was getting more optimistic when shortly after eight o'clock the unexpected happened. Some way off we heard the puffing of an engine and we listened intently trying to make out in what direction it was going. It must be on *the* railway; if we could reach it we should be safe. At times the sound seemed to die down, only to burst out again closer. There was something awe-inspiring

about the slow rhythmical puffing. Like the beat of a war drum in an African forest. I felt almost frightened. It came nearer and nearer, and then to our amazement the engine steamed into sight a hundred yards ahead of our hiding-place, along what we had thought to be a road and which the trees had prevented us from seeing clearly. It was a goods train, and on the sides of the trucks were the Dutch colours and the word "Nederland" in large letters.

We stood up and walked to the line; on the far side of it we saw a house with a Dutch advertisement on its side, and a signpost pointing to Spekholz . . . Holland! A thousand prison dreams of freedom faded into one reality: we were no longer prisoners.

## CHAPTER XXV

OF my own adventures there is little more to be told. We were unable to find any of the Dutch frontier guards or other officials to whom, in the ordinary course of events, we ought to have reported. This proved to be a very fortunate occurrence, as escaping prisoners were usually locked up and kept in prison until it had been ascertained that they were in reality prisoners of war and not smugglers or spies. Even when their statements had been verified a further fortnight's confinement had to be spent in quarantine.

After walking for about a mile we came into the village of Spekholz and, uncertain of what we should do next, made our way into a small shop. I still felt the necessity for caution and spoke to the old lady behind the counter in German, asking her for some cigarettes. To my horror she not only answered me in German, but asked me whence we had come and whither we were going. Her questions and the setting of the scene reminded me forcibly of old times in Germany and I began to have an unpleasant feeling that we might have made an awful mistake and not have crossed the frontier after all. The old lady soon explained, however, that she was an Austrian who had taken refuge in Holland, though for what reason I was unable to make out. Her whole house-

hold seemed very strange, consisting as it did of her daughter married to a German, a Belgian girl refugee, a German deserter and a Dutchwoman. They treated us very hospitably, gave us food and helped mend our clothes. One of the customers who came into her shop during the morning happened to be the local photographer and he immediately insisted on taking our photographs.

In the course of the day the old lady communicated with the head office of a coal mine just outside the village, which was owned and operated by Belgian refugees. In the afternoon we got a message from the manager of the company, asking us to come up to the works and spend the night there. There we were made extremely comfortable and next day the manager lent us sufficient money to buy a few articles of clothing and tickets to Rotterdam.

While we were at Speckholz, we made inquiries to find out whether the local people knew anything of Hardy's escape. If it was true that he had crossed the Dutch frontier it would be somewhere in this neighbourhood, because in the days when we had worked together we had always agreed to make for Aachen. I did not have to push my inquiries very far, for the local inhabitants were full of the news that about six weeks previously two English officers—"generals" the Dutch called them—had crossed the frontier some two miles away near Simpelveld. Much later I heard that Hardy and Loder-Symonds had escaped from a camp at Schweidnitz in Silesia and had travelled by train the whole way to Aachen. A remarkable performance considering that Loder-



Beverley Robinson

Two Dutch Girls

The Author

ON THE DUTCH FRONTIER, APRIL 17TH 1918



Symonds could talk no German and that the whole trip was accomplished with the help of two of Hardy's home-made passports.

On the afternoon of April 19th we drove to the railway station at Heerlen, and took the train for Rotterdam which we reached at ten o'clock that night. We noticed during the journey that we were under the continual observation of Dutch detectives. The police had evidently been warned of our arrival and were wondering what they should do with us for not having reported to the frontier authorities. We put up at a small hotel in Rotterdam for the night and next morning reported to the Consul-General. The Consulate people were extremely kind and provided us with all the money we required during our enforced stay in Holland. We were told that we should have to wait about ten days before a convoy of ships sailed for England. We bought some clothes in the town and then made for The Hague, where we spent the greater part of a week.

We met again large numbers of the prisoners we had known in Germany including the very batch who had been at Aachen only two or three days before. Wilkin was amongst them and was, of course, absolutely miserable at not having shared in our success. He told us how he had tried to follow a few minutes after our escape, but the sentry had been too watchful. Bitterly disappointed at his failure, he had consented to go to Holland. Stewart was there, and Elliot, Collier and many others. It took quite a lot off our own enjoyment to meet these old friends who had tried so hard to escape during the wretched years in



captivity and who were now condemned to remain in Holland for the rest of the war.

We had been warned by the British authorities not to talk too much of escaping adventures while at The Hague, and on no account to mention the name of the ship or date of its sailing. The Hague was full of spies ; in fact, many of the waiters in the best hotels were known to be German agents, and it was most amusing to watch them hovering round tables at which prisoners of war were seated, trying to pick up scraps of conversation and writing the secret notes on backs of menu cards.

We were notified secretly of the date on which our convoy was to sail, and at the appointed time we hurried back to Rotterdam and embarked. Next morning at dawn we steamed out into the North Sea. I had an unpleasant feeling that it would be just our luck to be recaptured at sea by a German submarine. Fortunately the blocking of Zeebrugge, which had been effected while we were still in Holland, had made this possibility much more remote. Escorted by British destroyers we spent the better part of two days zigzagging through mine-fields and submarine-infested waters. In the early morning of April 31st we steamed up the Thames estuary, and at nine o'clock we anchored off Gravesend.

For the next few weeks I was kept frightfully busy giving information on every conceivable subject to officers in various departments of the War Office and the newly formed Air Ministry. I had also begun learning to fly again, but I found time to despatch a considerable quantity of escaping kit, carefully con-

cealed in food tins to my friends in Germany. Later I had the satisfaction of knowing that many of these things had been received and had proved to be of value.

In August I returned to France. Just previously, in July, I had heard that a tunnel which had been in preparation for over a year at Holzminden had at last been completed and that twenty-nine prisoners had escaped. Many of these prisoners were ex-Neunkirchen tunnel workers, proving that our experience had been of some use. No less than ten of the party succeeded in crossing the Dutch frontier, and among them was Blaine. To my very great sorrow I never saw him again, for by the time he reached England I was back in France, and when I returned to England on leave after the Armistice the first news I heard was that he had been killed in an aeroplane accident.

Shortly after my return from Germany I got news of the death of Medlicott. He had escaped for, I think, the twelfth time, from a camp in the centre of Germany, but after a few days of freedom he and his companion had been recaptured. Guards were sent from the camp to bring them back, and it is to be supposed that these men had instructions to make sure, in case of any trouble, that the prisoners did not return alive. At all events, according to the German statement, Medlicott and his companion made a dash for freedom during the return journey. They were pursued by their guards, who headed them off and shot them both down. Strangely enough the old, inexperienced Landsturm soldiers succeeded in killing their victims with only one shot each, although

they were some way off and running. The bodies were brought back to the camp and the senior British officers were allowed to inspect them. Both bodies were covered with sheets, reaching to their heads through which they had been shot, but one of the British officers, suspecting foul play, succeeded in snatching away the sheet covering Medlicott's body. It was torn by more than a dozen bullet and bayonet wounds, There seems to be little doubt, both from this and from the conflicting statements issued by the Germans, that both these unfortunate men had been murdered in cold blood.

A very gallant fellow, was Medlicott ; one of the most daring pilots in France. As brave a man as I have ever met, foolhardy almost. There was hardly a jail in Germany he could not escape from, but, although on at least one occasion he came close to success, his plans lacked caution. This alone would not have caused failure ; it was purely bad luck that stopped him. And so it was with all of us. One might try and fail and try again. One might take all possible precautions and show the utmost determination, yet without luck there was no chance of success. Hundreds of prisoners must have tried seriously to escape ; scores tried again and again, but fortune only favoured a few. Out of some eight thousand officers in Germany, a mere handful—between forty and fifty—succeeded in regaining their freedom before the Armistice.

Many never returned ; others returned to die. It is strange how many of those I knew in prison and whose friendship I valued have disappeared : Blaine

and Medlicott, Stewart—killed after the war—Darcy Levy. . . . Poor Darcy Levy, perhaps his fits of depression at Zorndorf were a premonition of his fate. I saw him just after the war ; he was learning to fly again. The next I heard was that he had rejoined the North Russian Expedition. Engine trouble brought his aeroplane down in the enemy lines and there the Russians—I will not call them Bolsheviks, Russians are nearly all the same—murdered him, brutally, in cold blood.

Loder-Symonds was killed learning to fly. Hardy returned to France with his infantry regiment and lost a leg at the last great battle of Ypres, and two other ex-prisoners whom I had known slightly were killed.

I must confess to feeling a desire for revenge when I returned to France. I had several scores to pay my ex-jailers and, in those days when the world was mad, I enjoyed doing it. But, in spite of the joy of flying and the ever new sense of freedom, I was wretchedly lonely. The friends and companions of 1915 were most of them dead, a few were still prisoners, and the remainder had reached exalted ranks. True, there were on the battlefields of France friends like Hardy, but they were in the infantry and I never saw them. It was sad to realize that of all those captured flying in France, I was the only one to return to fly and fight on the same front.

I often wondered what would happen if I were recaptured, and I had made arrangements to pass under an assumed name. Fortunately I was not destined to languish again in a German jail. Several times

during the last few months prison loomed unpleasantly near. Twice the wheels of my aeroplane actually touched the ground in enemy territory, and I could almost hear a hard Prussian voice shouting the familiar "*Kommen Sie mit.*" Largely due to a very good engine and a stable machine, I somehow managed to get home on each occasion.

And, looking back and taking my own adventures as a whole, there is one thing I can assert without fear of contradiction : ill luck may have caused my capture, it was good fortune that set me free.

THE END

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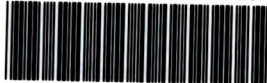
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